

Hyouketsu Kyoukai no Eden vol.7 - Blank Baptism

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Novel Updates

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Epub: Trollo WN/LN EPUB

A note going into this volume, Blank in the volume title is written the same as Igun'I. In the afterword, it was written as 空白の洗礼 which is literally "blank's baptism". I translated it as Igun'I back there seeing as there's nothing known as "blank" other than him who can possibly use baptism. Might be worth keeping in mind though.







ISBN978-4-8291-3651-5 CO193 ¥620E

定価:本体620円(税別)

富士見書房

氷結鏡界のエデン7 空白洗礼

「世界を構成する鍵。空白のこと、あなたの魔笛のこと、第七真音 律のこと。全てを教えてあげる。望む事実も、望まない事実も」 満面の笑みを浮かべ、空白は歌うようにシェルティスに告げた。

「あなたには全てを知って――絶望して欲しいですからね」

第三機関・異篇卿の拠点に潜入したシェルティスの前に、異篇卿・ イグニドが現れる。空白の存在にふしぎな郷愁に襲われ、シェルテ ィスは戸惑いを隠せないでいた。そして同じ頃。千年師・レオンの 前には、"理想の敵"が立ちふさがる――。

穢歌の庭に堕ちたシェルティスの"真実"が明かされ、"みえざ るもの"の実在証明が求められる、重層世界ファンタジー。



I am Igun'I.

A colorless color, the color of a completely forgotten past. A vacant post which should not exist.

Wait there; I will pursue you this time. [T/N: "there" written as "ideal".]



"It seems that I've fallen in love with him."

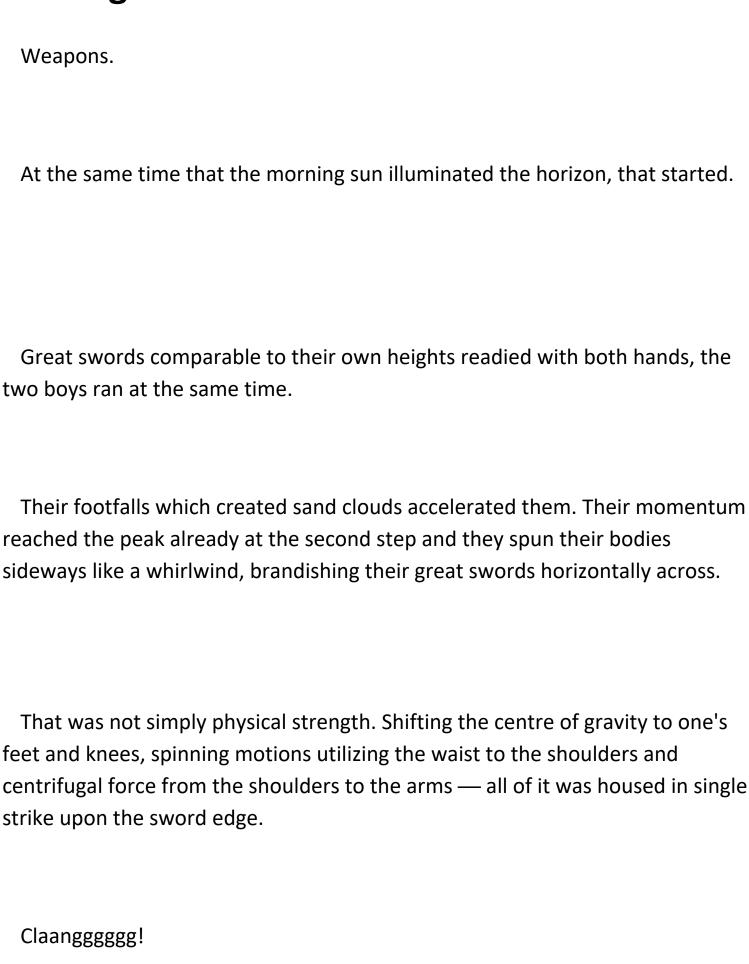
[&]quot;Stop.....only that, please.....no!"

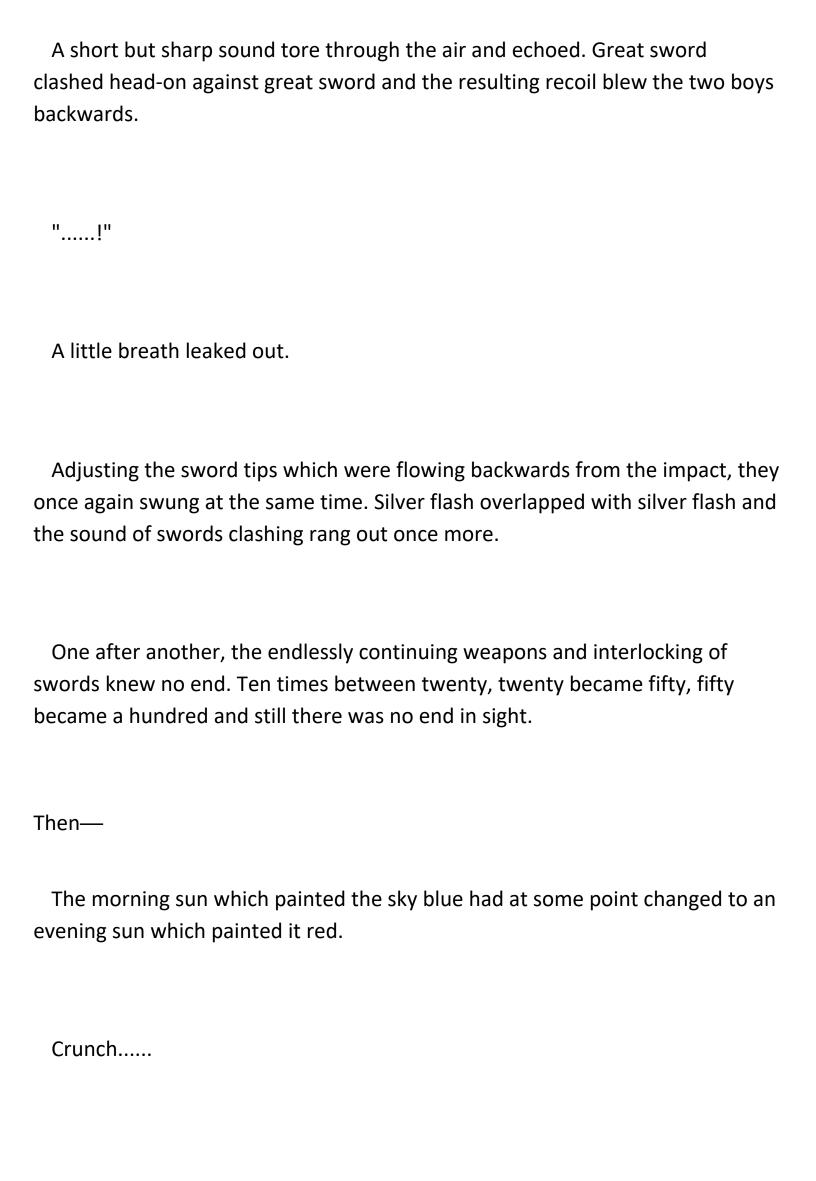
[&]quot;If you let me scorch you with my flames, I'll think about it."

[&]quot;This is the 'Chief World Project's' beginning."

[&]quot;The beginning and the plan's most important point."

Prologue - Pursued Goal



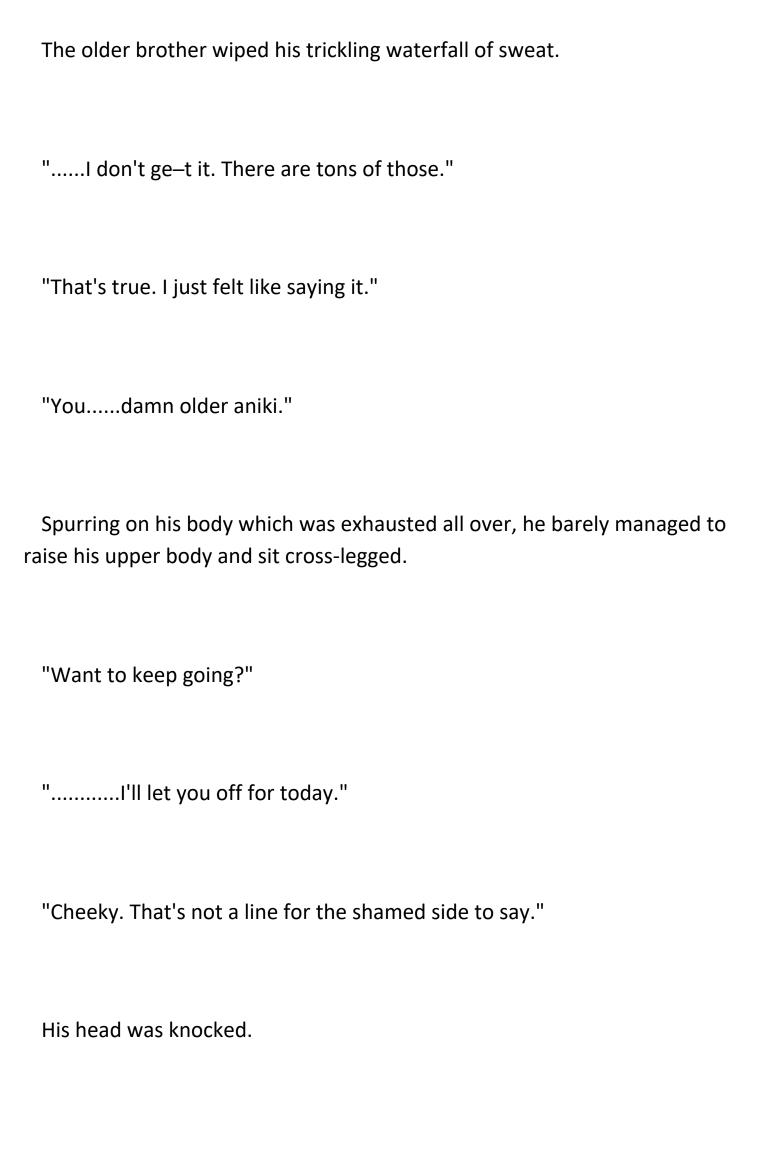


The great sword sank about halfway into the ground.
Letting go of its grip, one boy fell backwards while facing the sky.
II
The boy looked at the sky with eyes which clearly showed fatigue. His dazzling blond hair had become covered in dirt and his simple training shirt had countless rips cut into it.
II II
In an absentminded state, he only continued to breathe loudly.
And.
"Done?"
The figure of a person looked down at that boy.
"If you're done, say you're done and then fall over. I thought it was a trap and was about to attack you."

The boy looking down suddenly lifted the corners of his mouth.
Everywhere along his forehead and nape was flowing with sweat like a waterfall, but there was not a scratch upon his shirt. Despite having fought that harsh of a battle from dawn to dusk.
"isda!"
The collapsed boy murmured.
"What was that?"
"This damn brother" [T/N: The word used is "aniki". Fairly lacking in respect.]
"Silence."
The silver-haired boy kicked the fallen boy's head without mercy and smiled

intrepidly.

The collapsed side and the side looking down — both had silver hair, blue eyes and sharp and graceful features. They were boys in their early teens but with a tall body close to that of an adult in height.
"Whyare you stronger?"
The younger brother clenched his molars and leaked that out.
"Becauseeven though you were only born a little earlierthan me."
Yes, his birth was only slightly earlier.
Even so, what was this difference?
No matter how many times he challenged him, no matter how much special training he did, he could not close this gap in skill. And in the end, his desperation attack had ended with these results.
"Do you think there's an older brother who would lose to his younger brothe in this world?"



"I'll get going now too. I have to hurry or I'll get yelled at by the captain."



".....Even though you'll get drilled about when you returned." Rising up in the center of the floating continent, Orbie Clar, the tower which connected to the heavens — ' Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'. His older brother was working as a Guard of the tower but he would sneak away unnoticed by his superior like this and come to the Living District, then accompany him for his training like this. At those times, it seemed that he would be scolded for leaving without permission. "Yeah, that.I wonder if it'll be especially harsh this time? Since I was told to behave myself because the promotion exam is coming up soon." "Sennenshi?" "Too early for that. I'm still a Regular Guard. Next is an Elite Guard and after that, a Senneshi. Well, I can probably do it." ".....You're saying that lightly."

The most powerful bodyguards of which each of the five Priestesses had only one, '

Sennenshi

'. Even throughout the floating continent <Orbie Clar>, they were accomplished martial artists whom you could count on one hand. Swordplay, hand-to-hand combat, gun handling, spear techniques: they were inidividuals who had reached their respective territories in which they were unmatched by any on the floating continent <Orbie Clar>.

"Because if you talk about Sennenshi......"

"It's nothing special. It's the same as having already become one."

It was his older brother's habit. He would easily speak of difficult accomplishments.

"—Leon."

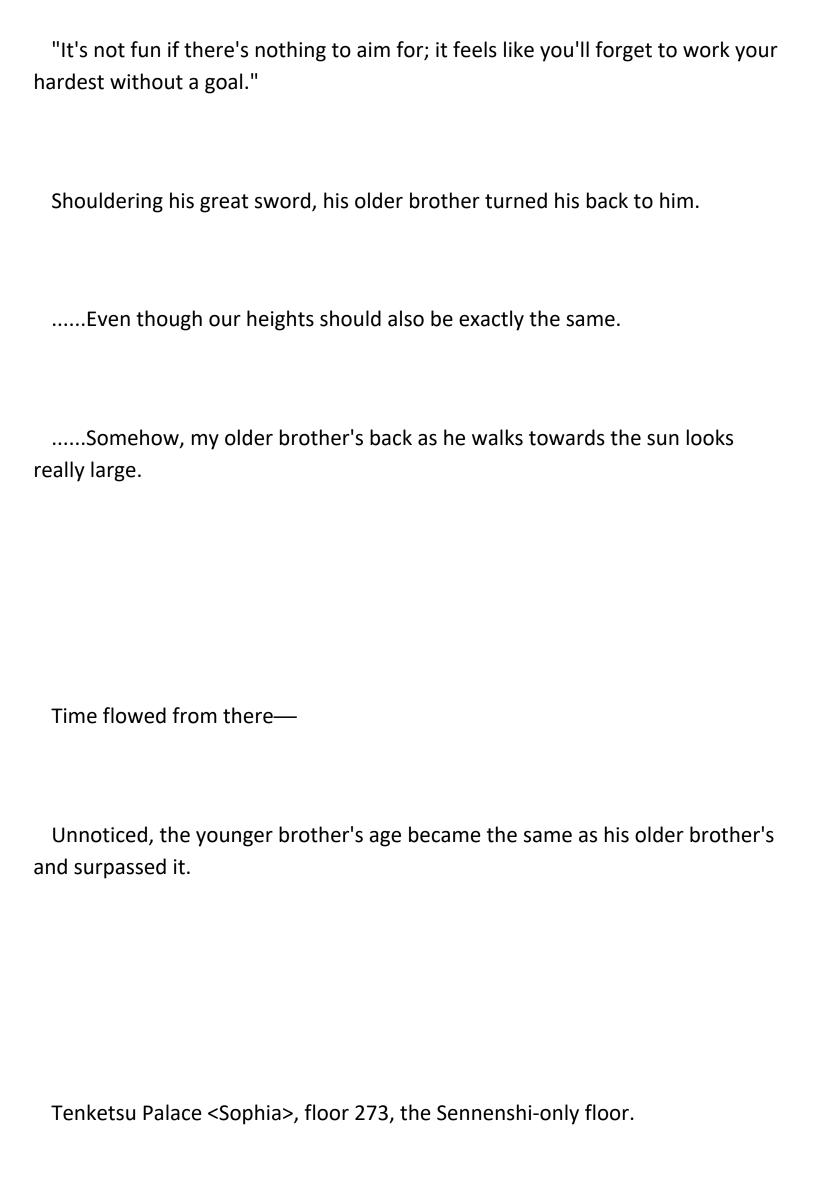
"Mm."

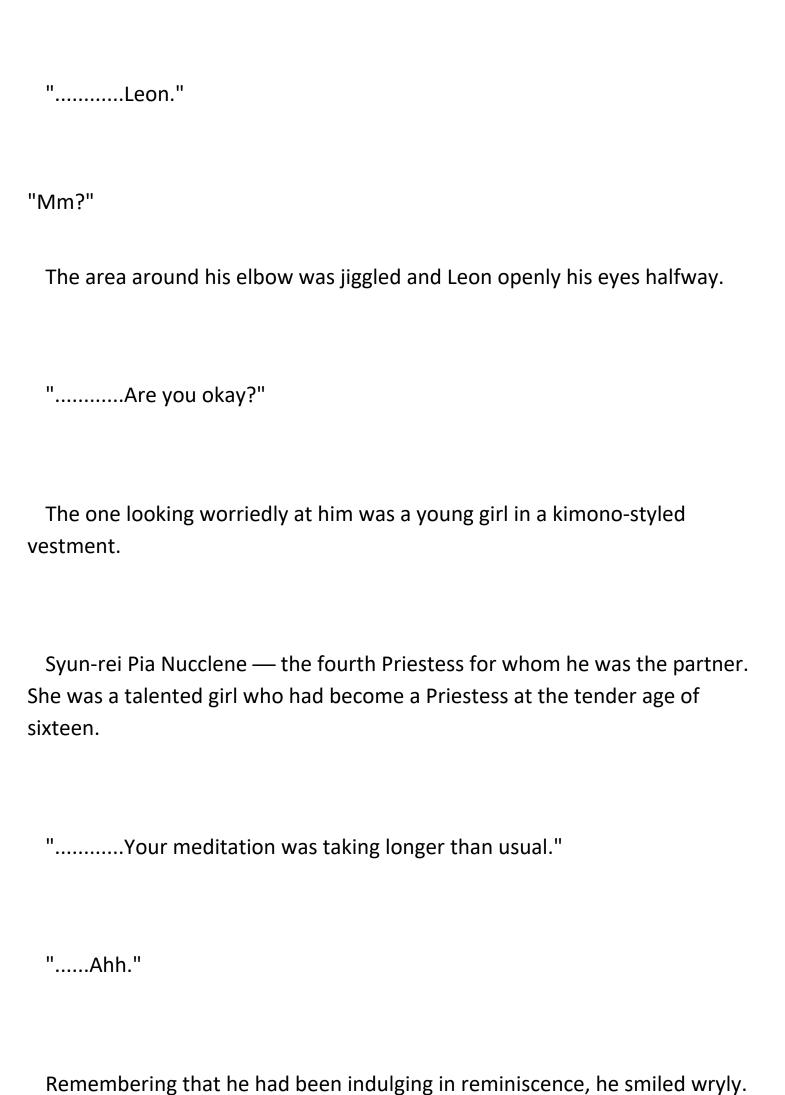
Having his name sudden called, he blinked.

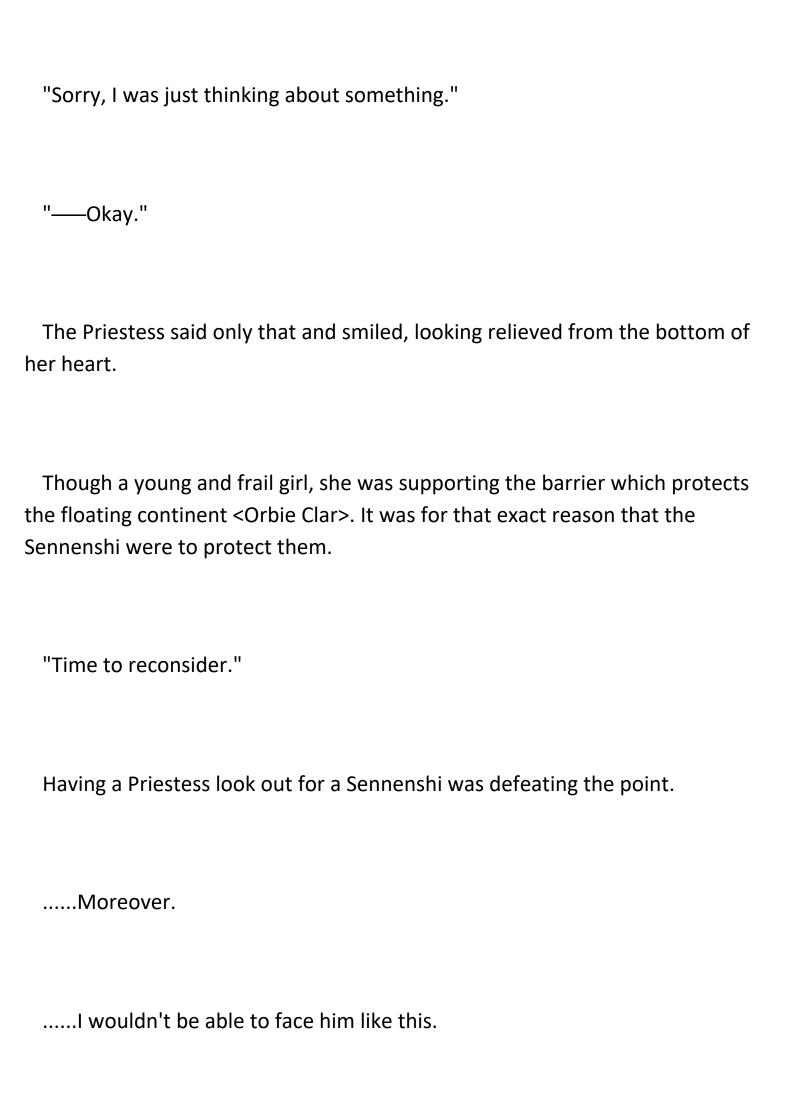
"It should be fine around now; I don't mind if you enter Tenketsu Palace



above'."
Suu — his older brother pointed his index finger to the skies.
"'Master of Heaven
'. There is only one within the tower: the partner of the Queen."
"Ahh, that."
Hearing his brother's proclamation that he'd gotten used to, Leon didn't even feel like hiding his wry smile.
—Even though it's unknown whether that really exists or not.
It was of the same rank as the Queen who was master of the tower, thus '
Master of Heaven
'. At any rate, it was a class of which nobody had been publicly promoted to. There should be nobody there but it was certain that the class was prepared in Tenketsu Palace <sophia>'s central computer.</sophia>
"Aniki really likes those kinds of things."



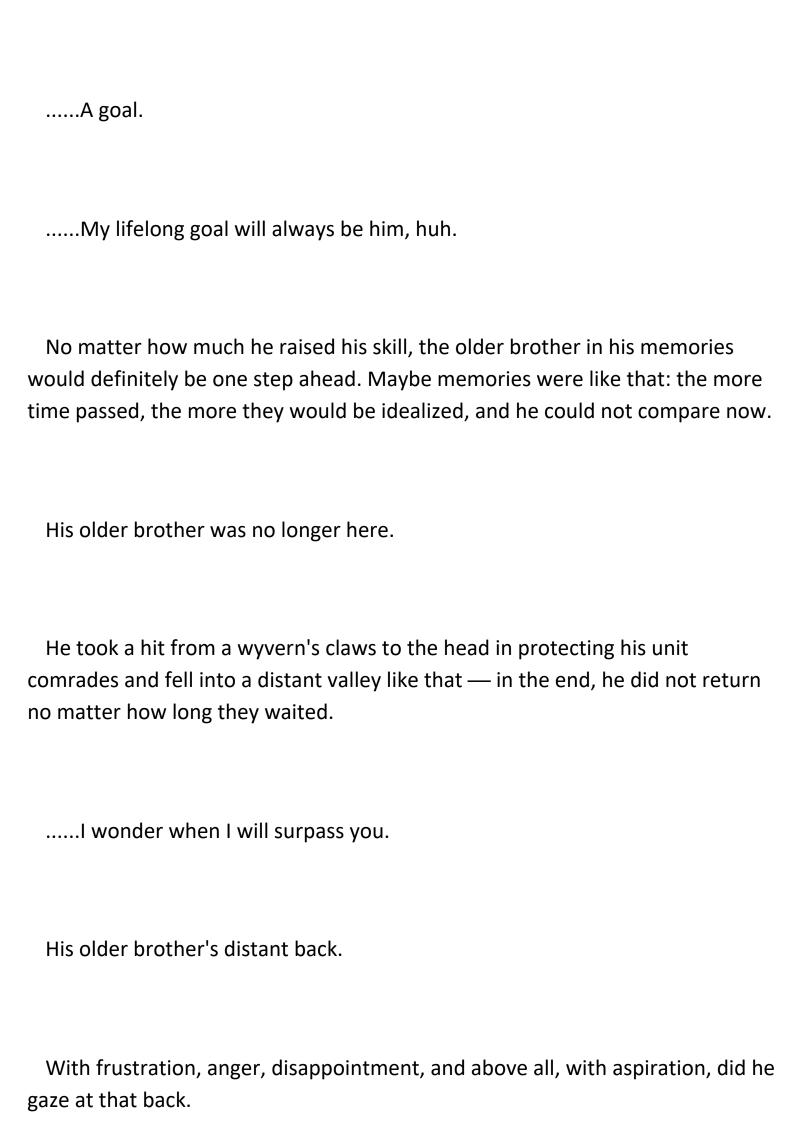


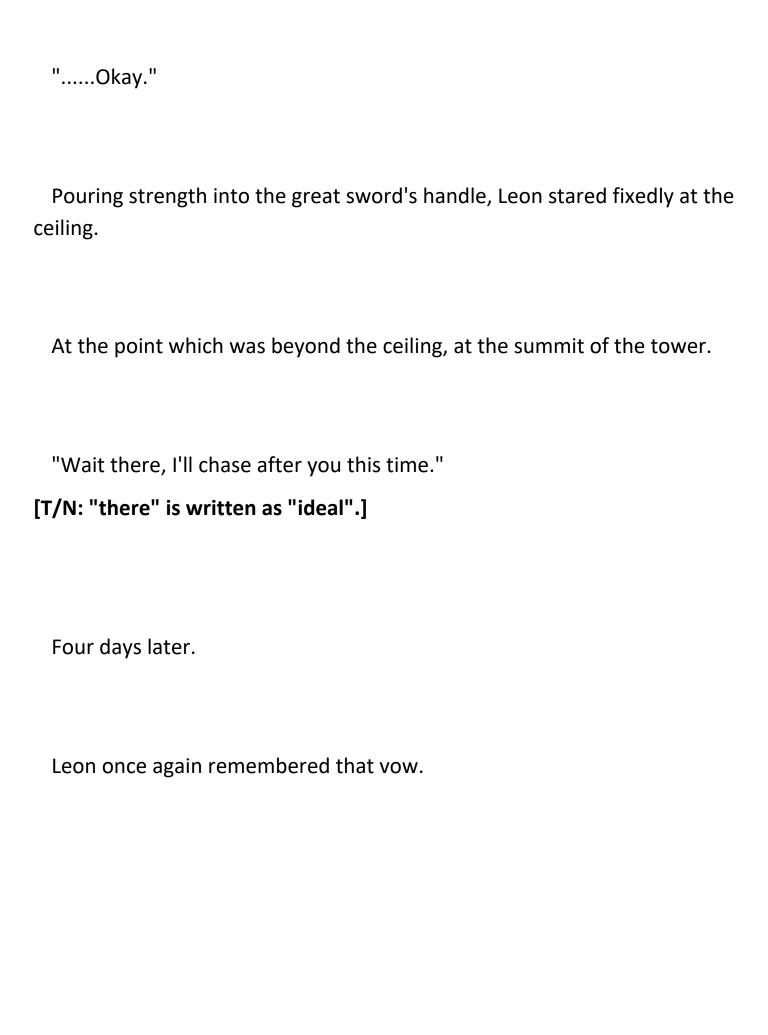


Standing up wordlessly, he looked down at the floor which had been polished almost like a mirror.
A shockproof board colored a rusty blue. It was not just the floor but also the walls and ceiling. There were also heat-resistant, shockproof metal plates everywhere on this training floor.
Move away. He signaled that to Syun-rei with his eyes and he took a step away from her in the himself.
""
He gripped the great sword which had a twofold structured hilt. The non-standard great sword which surpassed an adult in height was a personal sword tailored precisely for Leon's physique and muscular strength.
He swung that sword up and down.
With all his strength.
With the intention of copying his older brother's sword from that time.

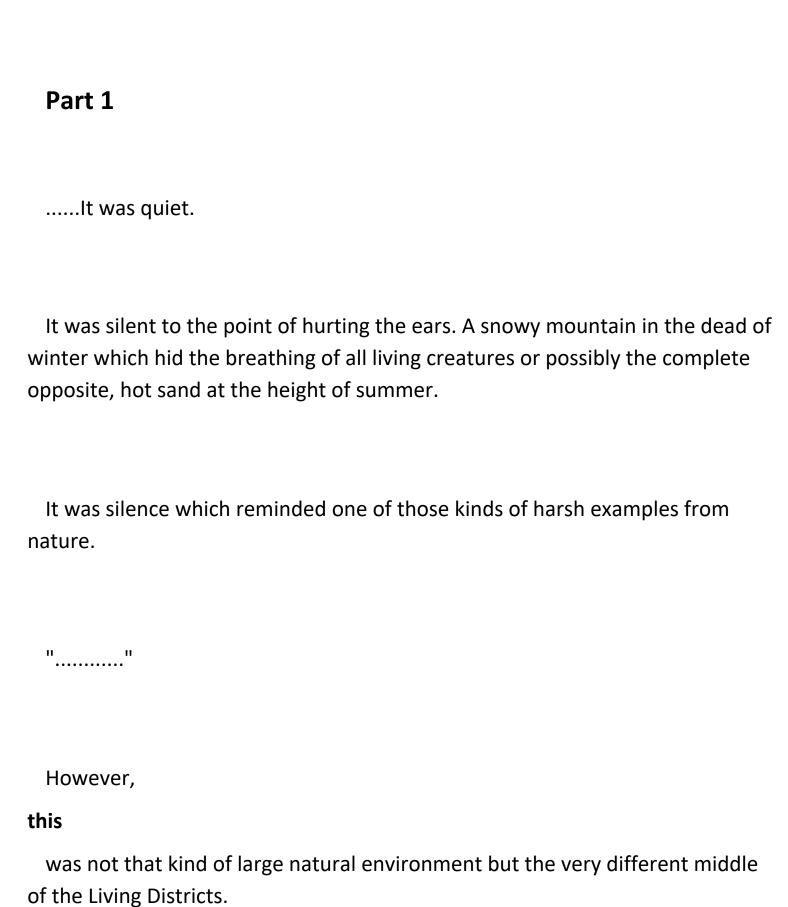
The sword whipped up a whirlwind while shining. Leaving behind the sound and air, just single-mindedly sword strikes devoid of distraction.
But—
"Leon?"
"It's far."
In front of Syun-rei who tilted her head, Leon put on a thin wry smile.
It's still far.
Rather than far, the gap has widened even more since then.
II
It's not fun if there's nothing to aim for; it feels like you'll forget to work you hardest without a goal.
11

"...."



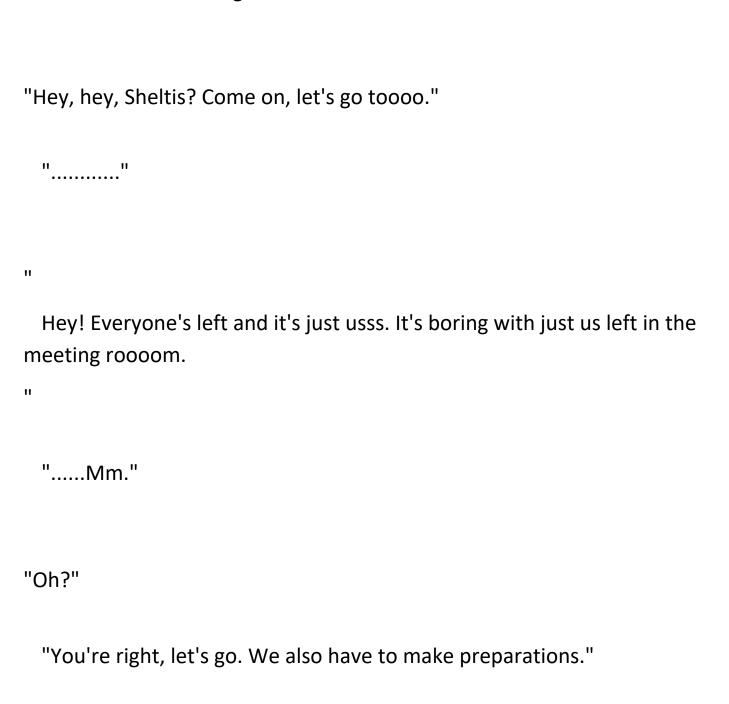


Chapter 1 - The Separated



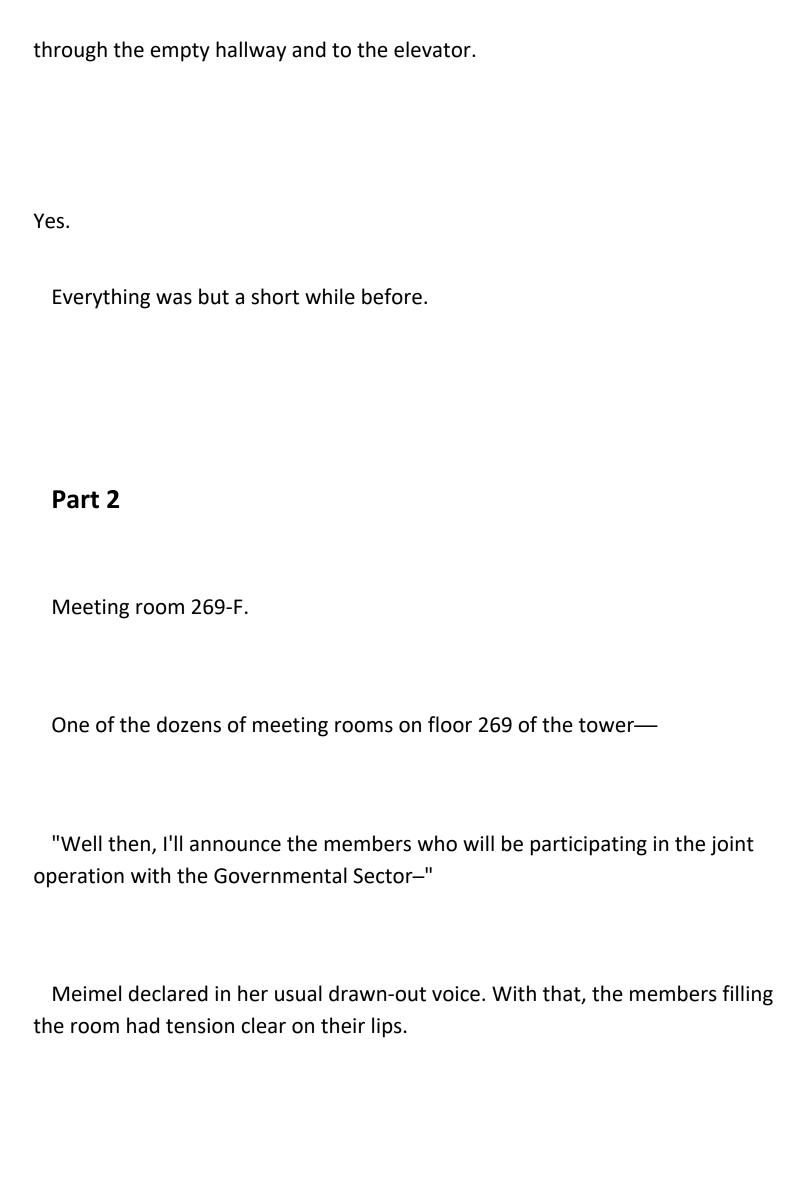
Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, floor 269.

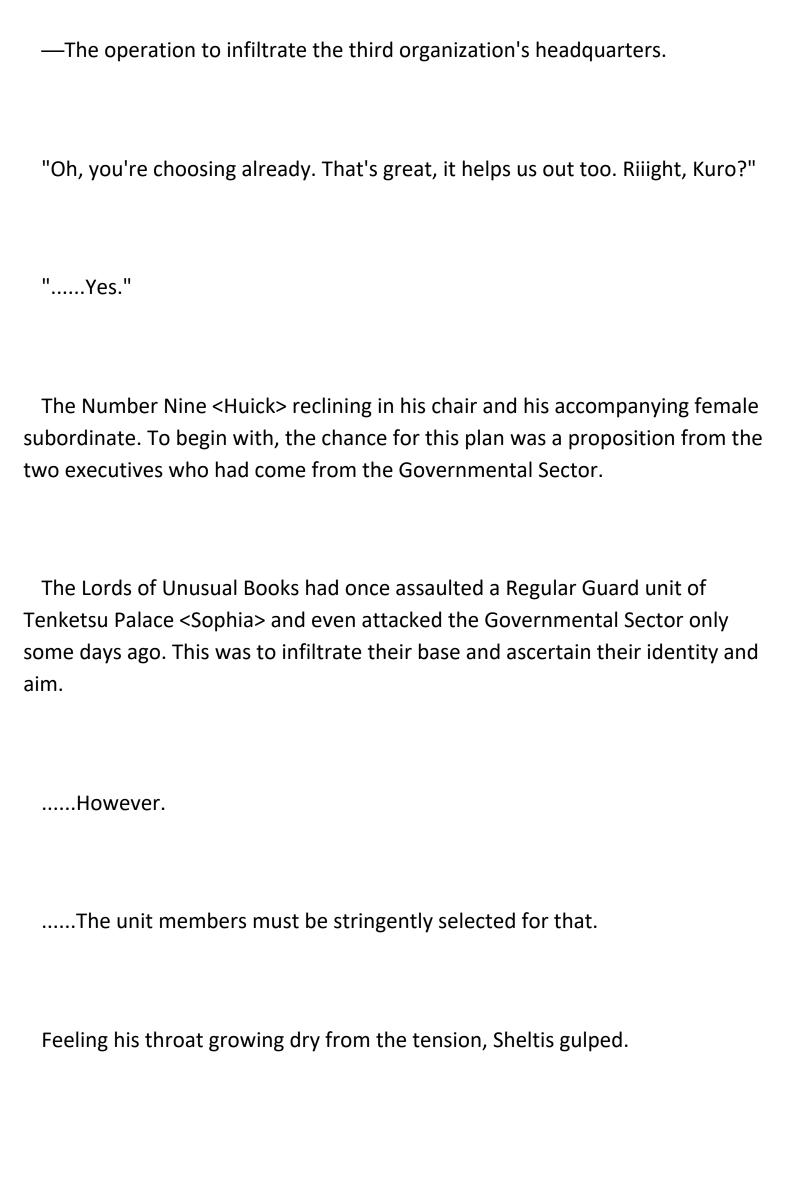
The tower which stood at the center of the floating continent, Orbie Clar, on a floor near the summit. Normally, it would be used by the executives of the tower for their meetings.



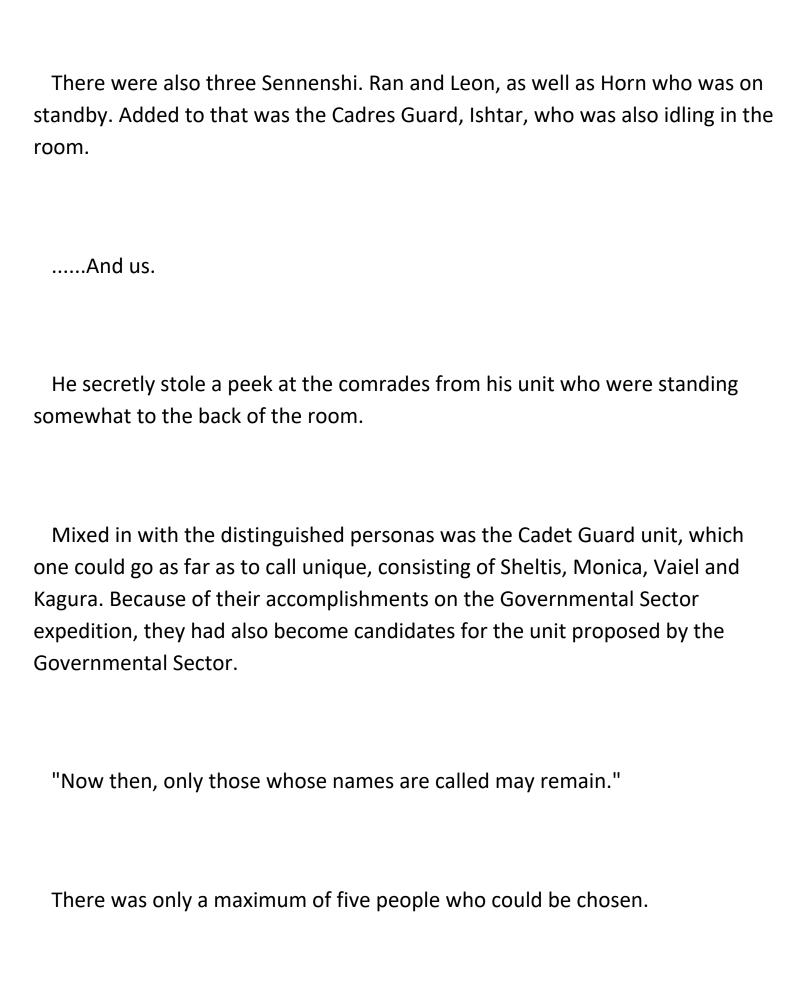
Left all alone in the room, Sheltis looked towards the ceiling light and sighed.

—Both his hands had been balled.
Opening his sweaty hands, he supported himself with the round table and stood from his chair.
That's unexpected; I expected you to be jumping for joy.
"I'm not a dog."
Shrugging in response to machine crystal <ilis> which was blinking at his chest, he moved towards the room's door.</ilis>
Meeting room 269-D. He pushed open the door labeled as such.
I can't celebrate yet.
That will have to wait until I know if Igun'I knows how to purify my mateki.
Holding his breath, he forced back all the cramp-like tension throughout his body. Passing through the door of the empty meeting room, Sheltis went

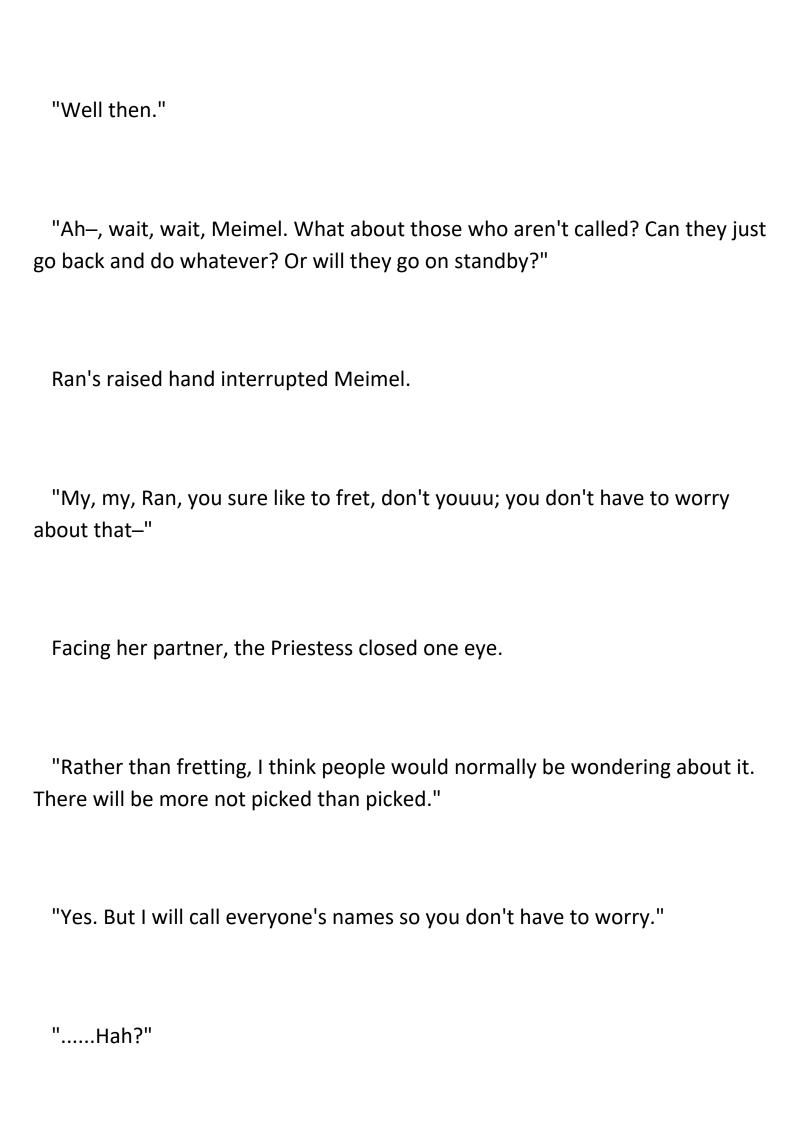


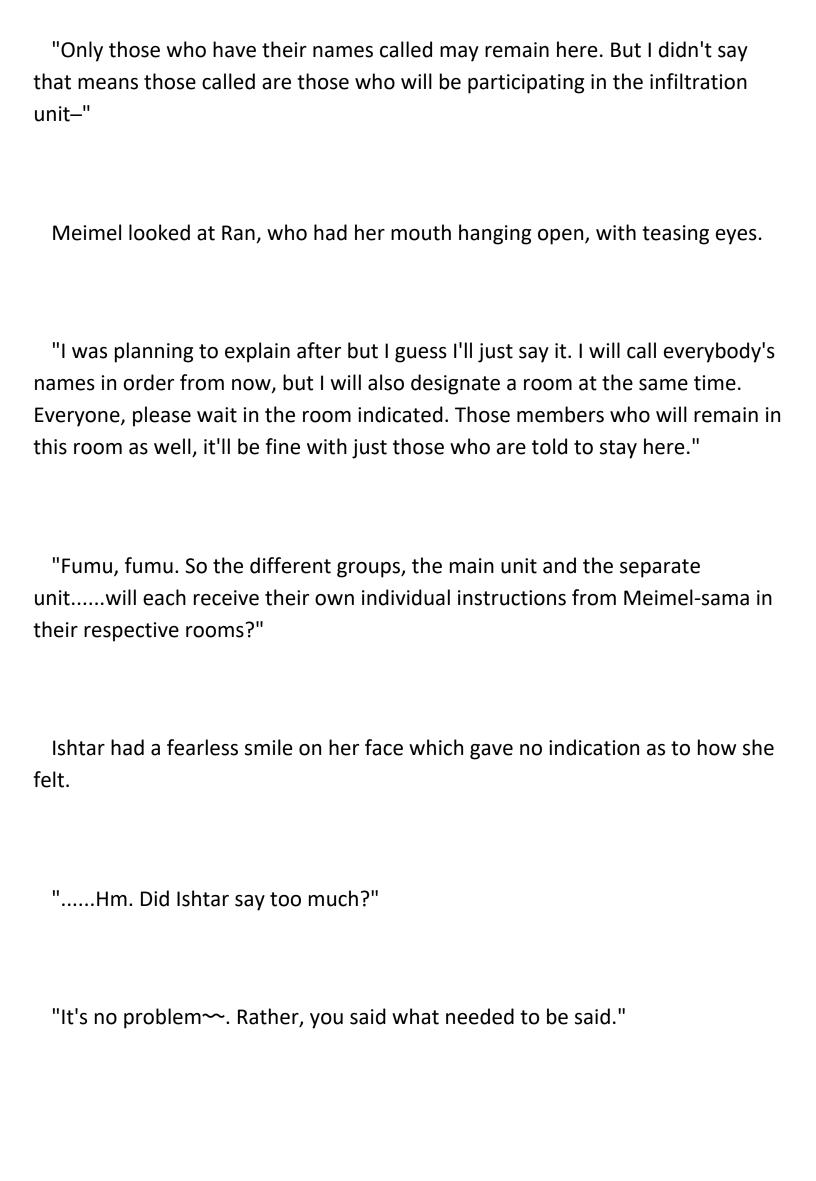


At any rate, the opponents which '
Golden
' Maha and '
Blank
' Igun-I belonged to were of unknown strength. Their scale aside, nothing of their objective was known either. Just one thing was known: those who belonged to the group known as the Lords of Unusual Books had monstrous battle potential. Because they were infiltrating the heart of such an enemy, being chosen applied more of a heavy pressure than a sense of accomplishment.
"Say, Kuro, who do you think will be chosen?"
"Huick-sama, please don't ask such a question in front of the people concerned."
Across from her superior who had his eyes semi-closed happily, Kuro shook her head at them with an exasperated look.
—Those of an absolute level in the tower gathered in the room.
There were three Priestesses. Meimel and Ymy, as well as Viola who was on standby.



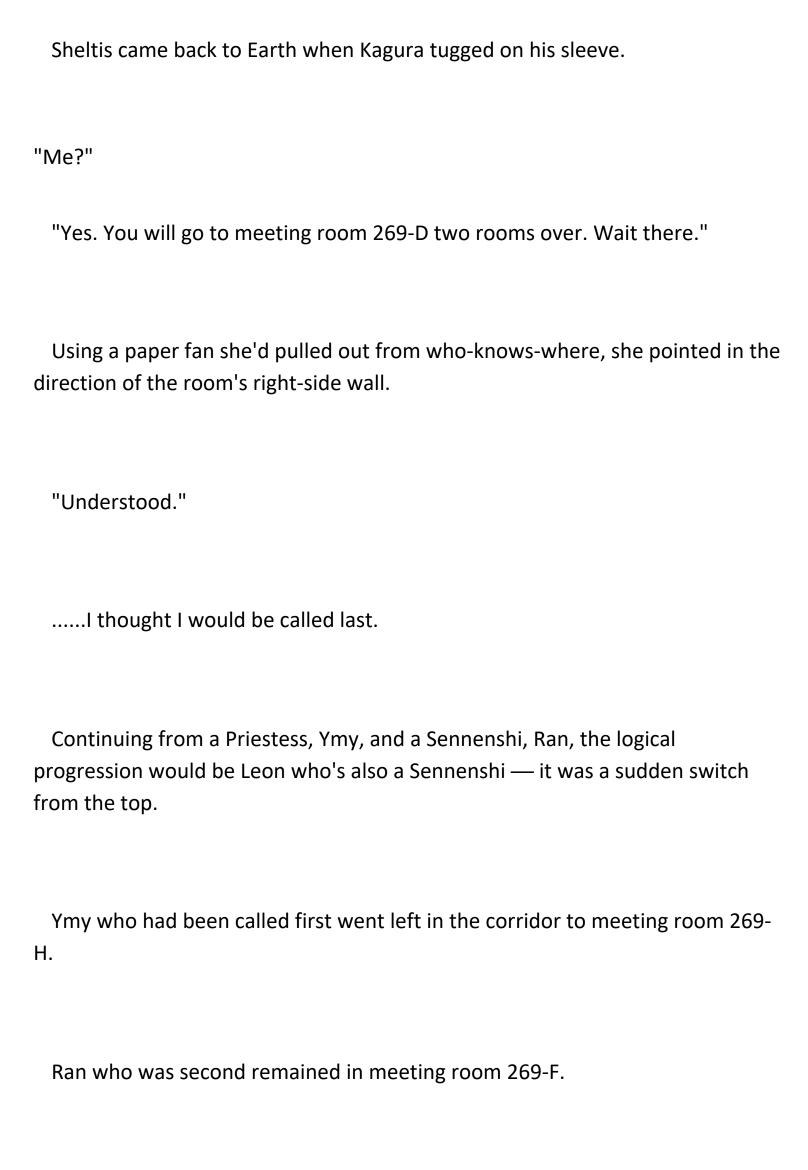
With the infiltration being a covert operation, these were the select few elite. Only four people could infiltrate at one time — so with the Ninth <Huick> and Kuro being pre-decided members, there were only two who could be chosen for the main unit. The remaining three would form a separate unit.

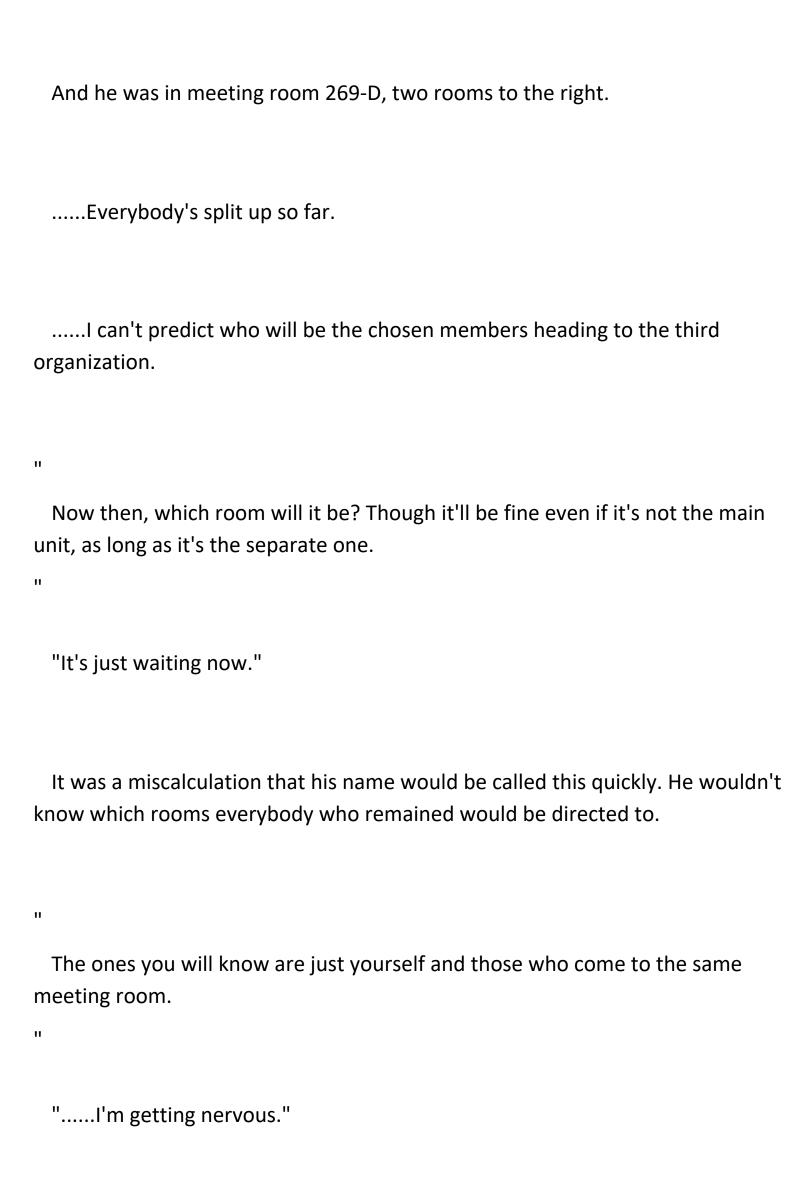


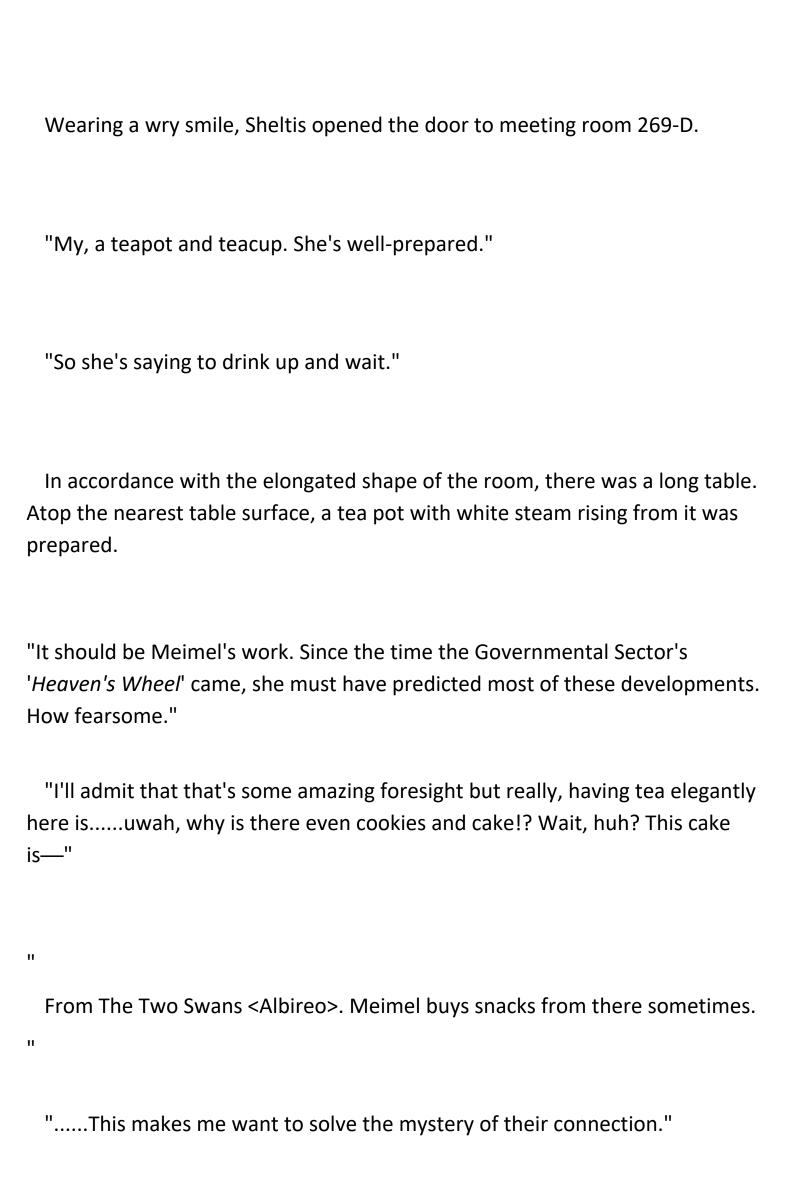




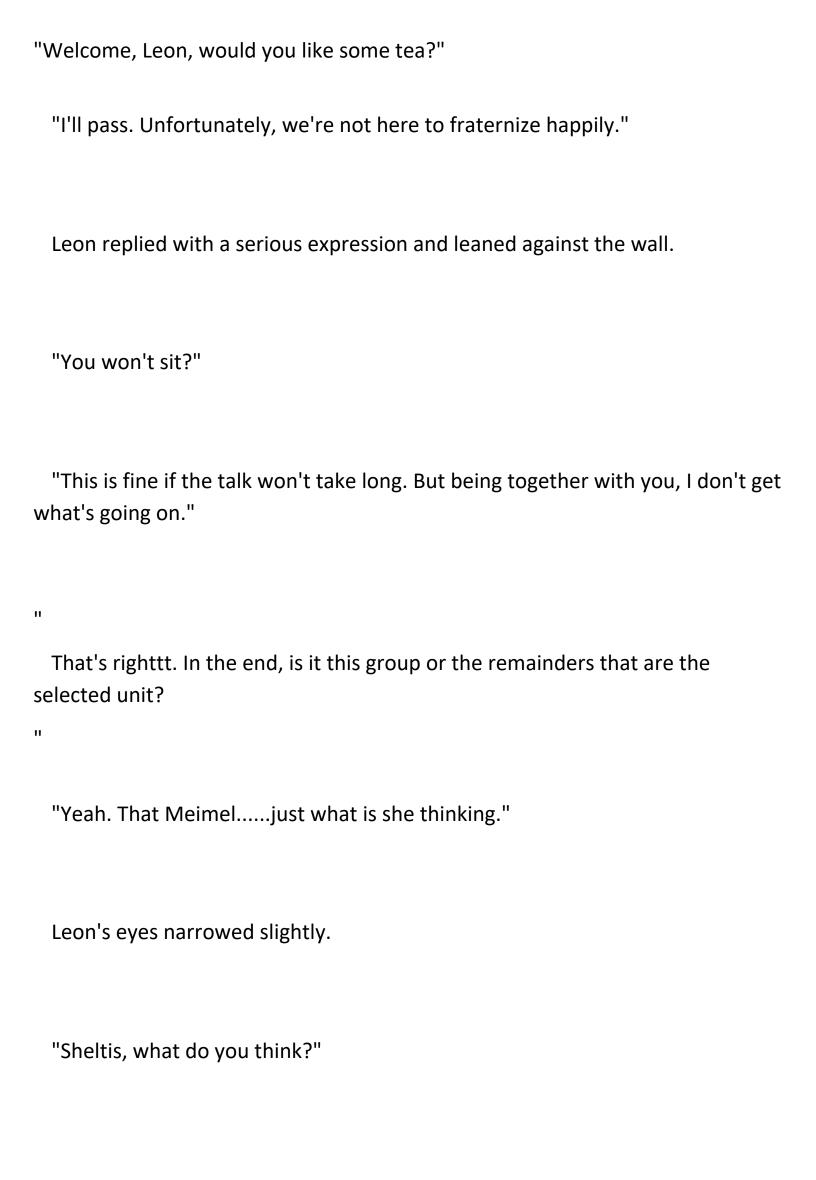




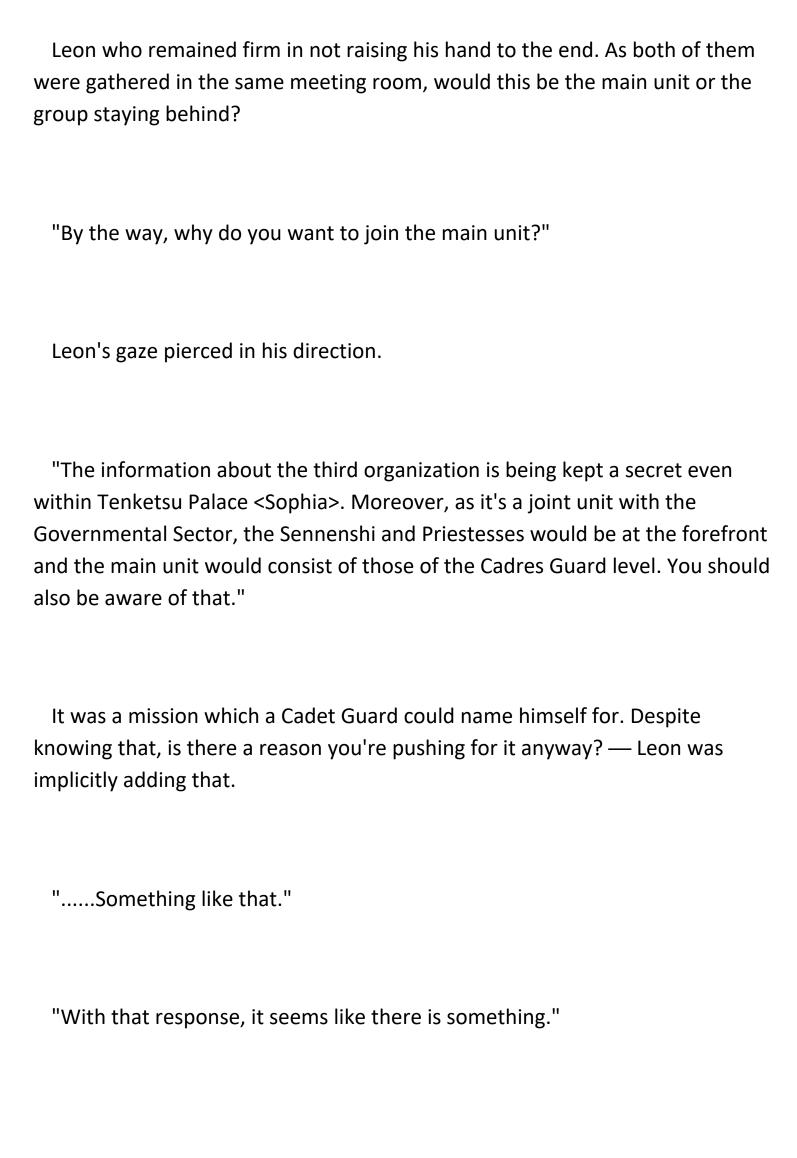


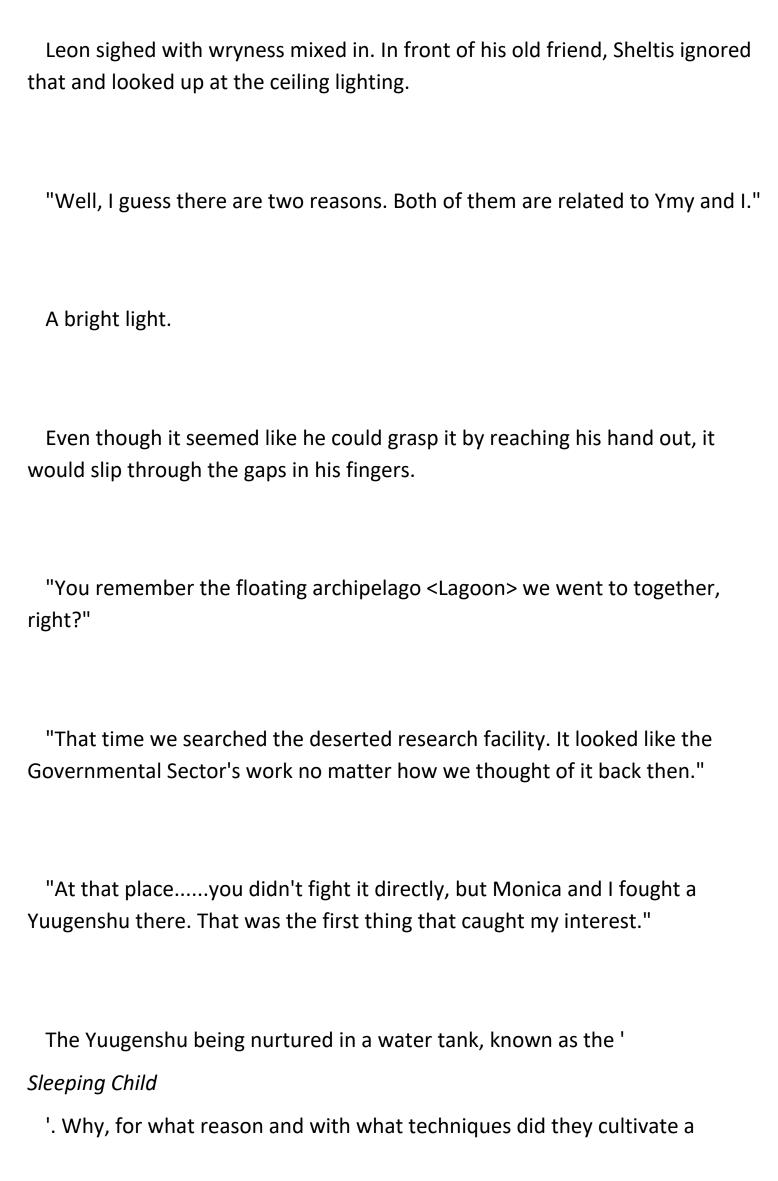


Though they've been prepared, let's set aside the tea and snacks. He chose
the table just behind the one with a tea cup on it and sat on a seat at the edge
"Now we wait to see who will come."
You can make a rough estimate based on the members who were called. Oh, speak of the devil.
Footsteps were heard from the other side of the door.
"Maybe this should be called an inseparable relationship."
"Leon?"
It was simultaneous.
Sheltis called his name at the same time as the silver-haired young man opened the door and showed himself.

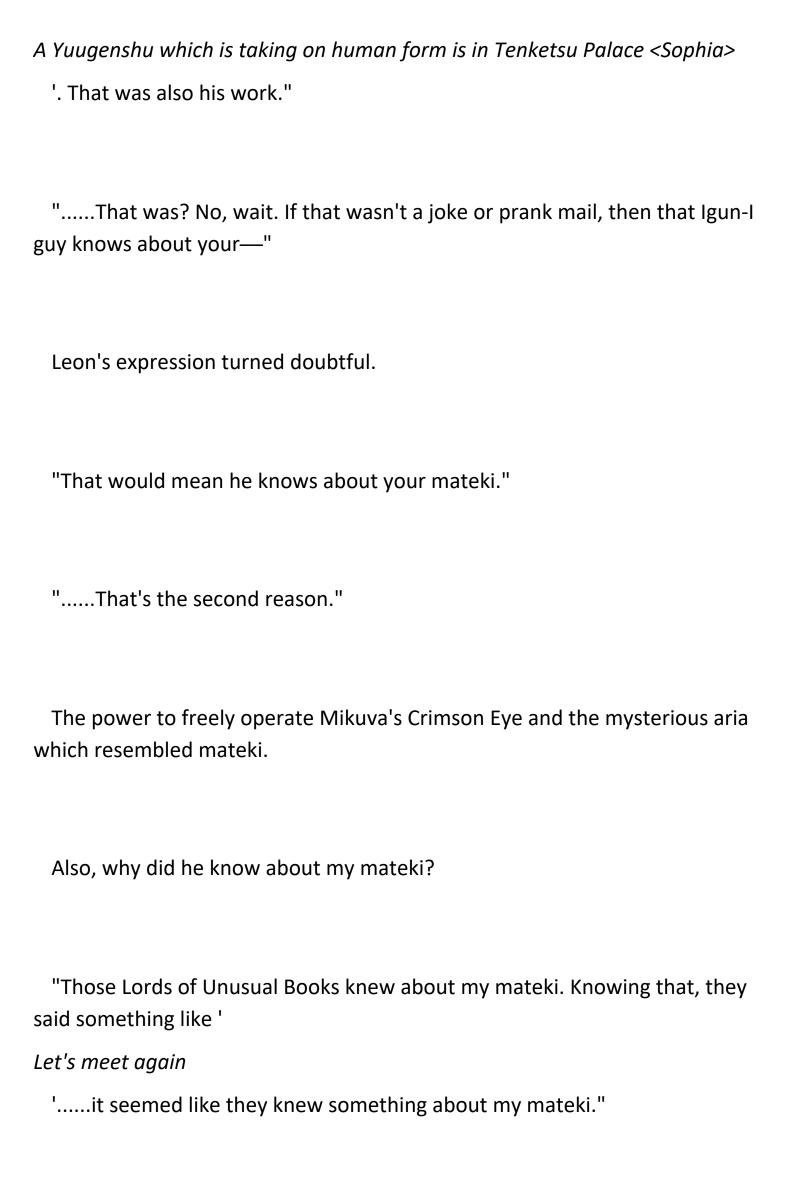


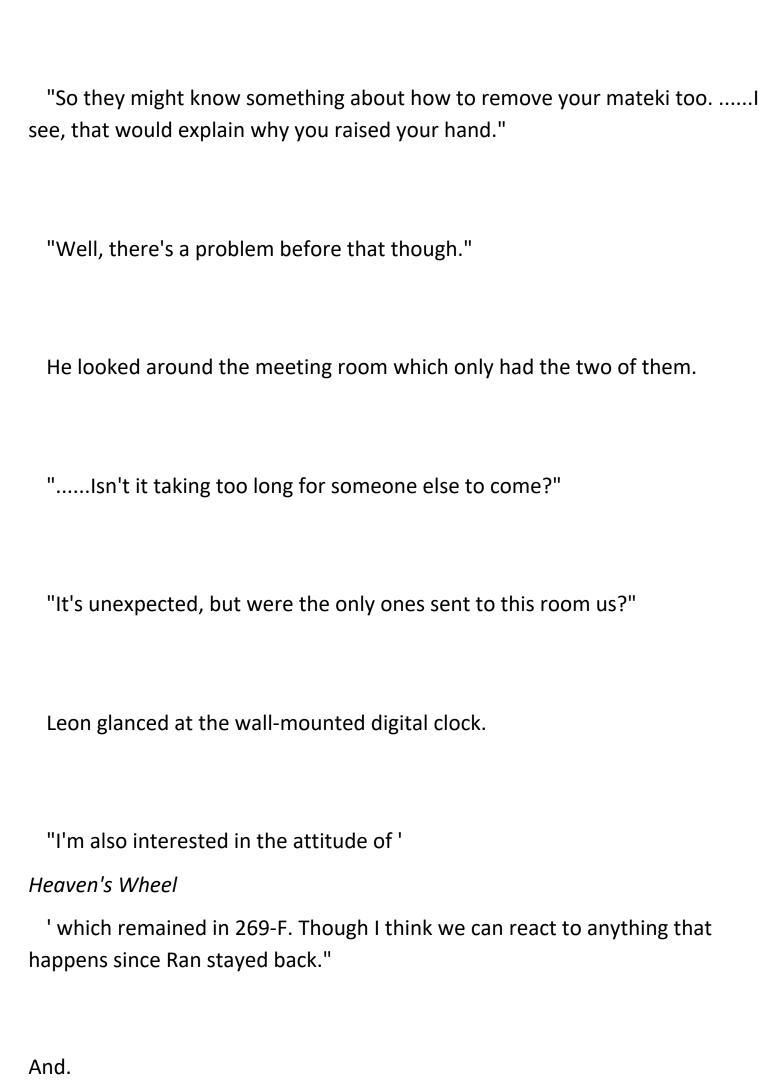


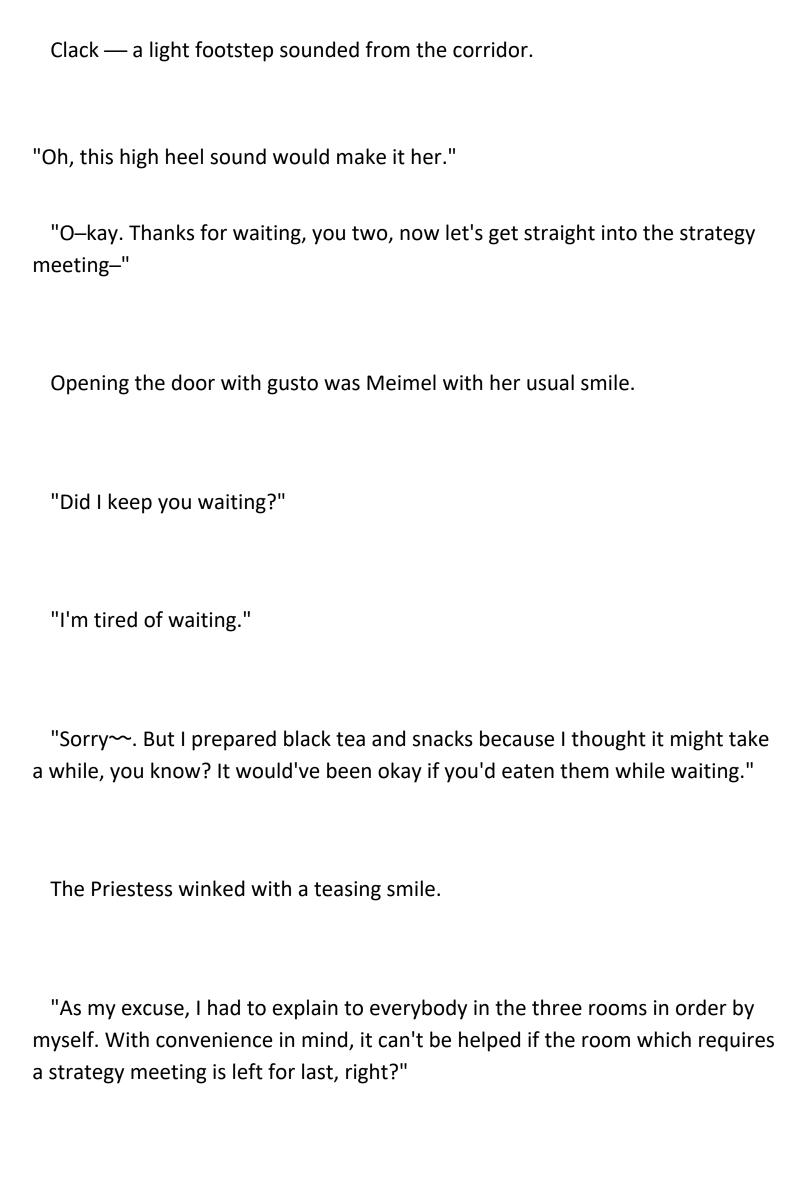




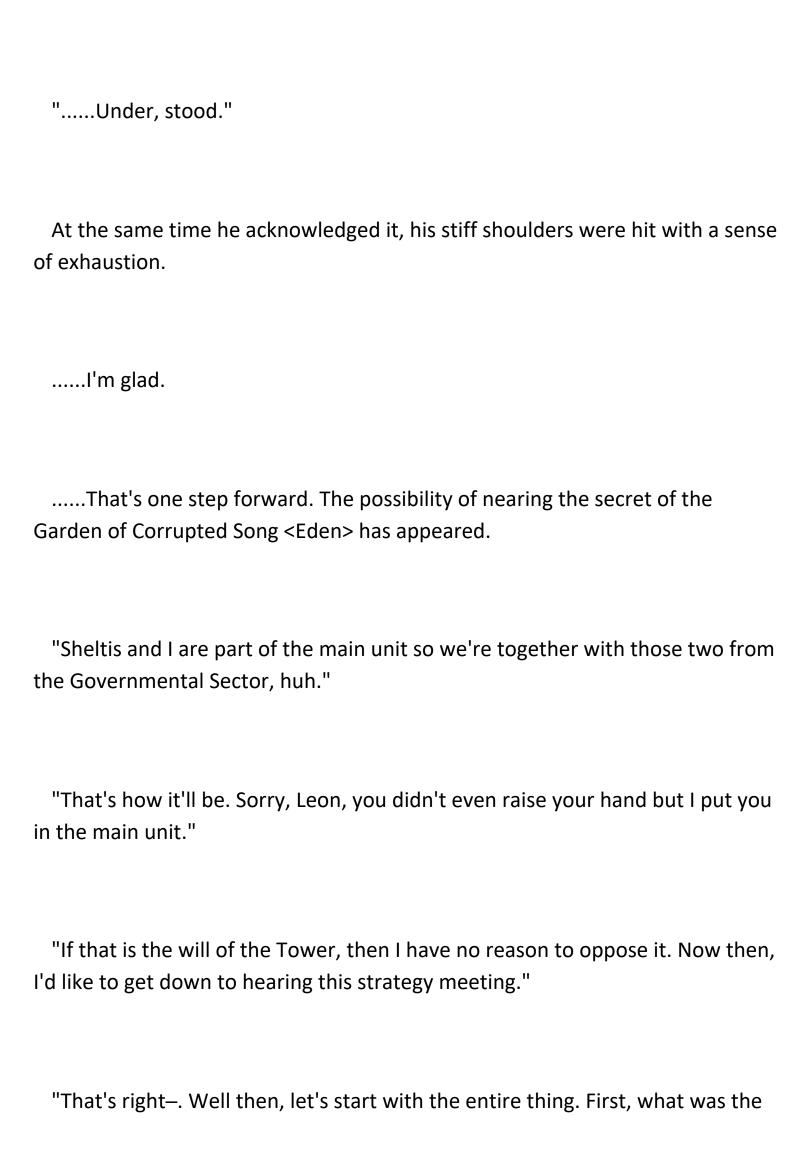
Yuugenshu?
"Nurturing a Yuugenshu is not something somebody would normally think ofThere should be something to it. If we figure out the third organization's objective, the investigations into the Yuugenshu and the Garden of Corrupted Song <eden> should also progress. It might also be able to lessen the load on Ymy."</eden>
"I see, so that's the reason connected to Ymy."
It seemed that he'd understood as his expression loosened.
"The other one is?"
"The Lords of Unusual Books."
"The shinryoku spell caster known as Golden Maha? I heard you repelled him though."
"No, not him. The other one known as Igun-I. You also know about the case a while ago where a mail was simultaneously sent to Tenketsu Palace <sophia>'s work terminals that went like, '</sophia>













"Speaking from the results, you two of meeting room D are the main unit.

After that, Ran and the three Cadet Guards I made stay in meeting room F are the ones staying behind. Ymy and Ishtar who were sent to meeting room H are one of the separate units. Do you understand up to there?"

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"The last thing I'm curious about is that '
one of the separate units
' part."
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Leon pointed it out blandly with a serious face. And that was exactly right; she had specifically added '

one of

' to it so it was like there also a '

second'."

"Well, we'll leave that for later. Next is.....right, shall we talk about the distribution of everybody?"

As if having discerned the murmurs within him, Meimel continued. Raising her hand up slowly, she extended her index and middle fingers.

"First, for the joint unit, this was decided almost immediately. At any rate, there are only two from the Governmental Sector. For covert operation, it's

understandable to have a few elite. In that case, we of Tenketsu Palace must also send a few elite. Would it be appropriate to send two like the Governmental Sector or three? Then let's put two in the main unit, one in the separate unit and have the remainder stay behind. Like this, the general framework was decided."

11

Hearing that, I'm relieved. The Governmental Sector said there could be up to five, but if we sent out five Sennenshi or Priestess-level people, the overall strength of the tower would be in danger.

11

"That's exactly it. Speaking from how it turned out, no Priestesses are in the main unit or separate unit. It would be a great departure from a Priestess' true role and, to begin with, there are no Priestesses excelling in covert techniques. At this point in time, it has been decided for Ymy, Viola and I to remain in the tower. Then came what to do with the main unit.....right, Sheltis?"

The Priestess looked at him with a meaningful sidelong glance.

"The joint plan with the Governmental Sector. I was happy that you raised your hand to start with, but I would have had you take part even if you didn't."

".....Is that how it was?"

"The reason is simple. The ones that you will be facing from now on are Golden <Maha> and Blank <Igun-I> and the one who knows them the best is you. Particularly the Lord of Unusual Books known as Blank <Igun-I> has not been seen by a single Priestess or Sennenshi. We only know his name."

11

Ah, I see. If you think about it calmly, that's true—. There was a reason you would be chosen for sure.

ı

".....Apparently."

The only one who knew the appearance of Blank < Igun-I> who had appeared at the Governmental Sector's Holy Hall was just him.

Rather than the minus point of being a Cadet Guard, the plus point of having directly confronted and gained information on two of the Lords of Unusual Books was greater.

11

Then, Meimel, the reason for adding Leon to the main unit is really that?

"

"Yes, with a long history of working together, they should be synched right down to their breathing. If it were anybody other than you in the main unit, I would have chosen Ran instead of Leon."

At any rate, this was how the two members of the main unit had been decided.

The next curious point was the single person in the separate unit.

"The one person chosen for the separate unit should be one who will be a simple and powerful fighting force. She should also have fought against one of the Lords of Unusual Books before. Now then, would it be Horn or Ran who are Sennenshi or possibly the Cadres Guard, Ishtar? But I have a different mission that I would like to give the Ishtar the Cadres Guard. That's why, there were two options for the separate unit. Now then, did I choose Ran? Or Horn?"

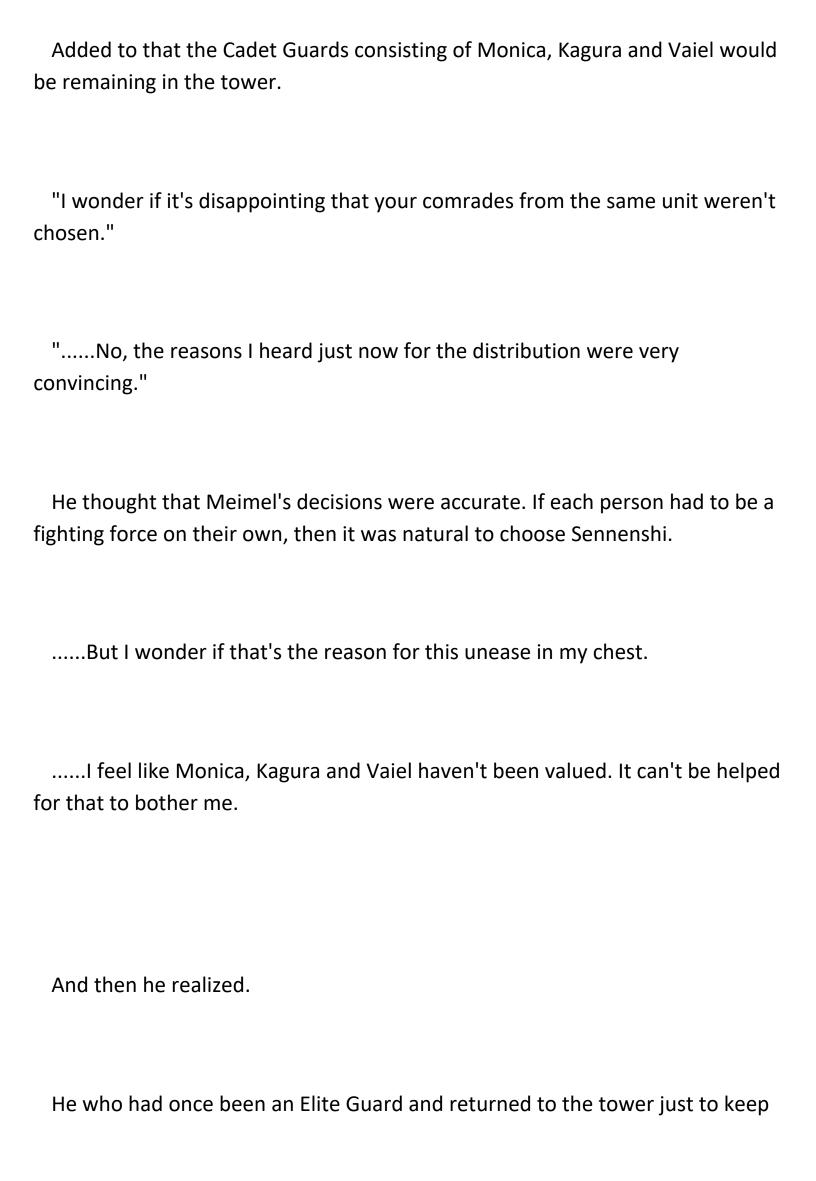
Both are Sennenshi. There's also no doubt about their strength.

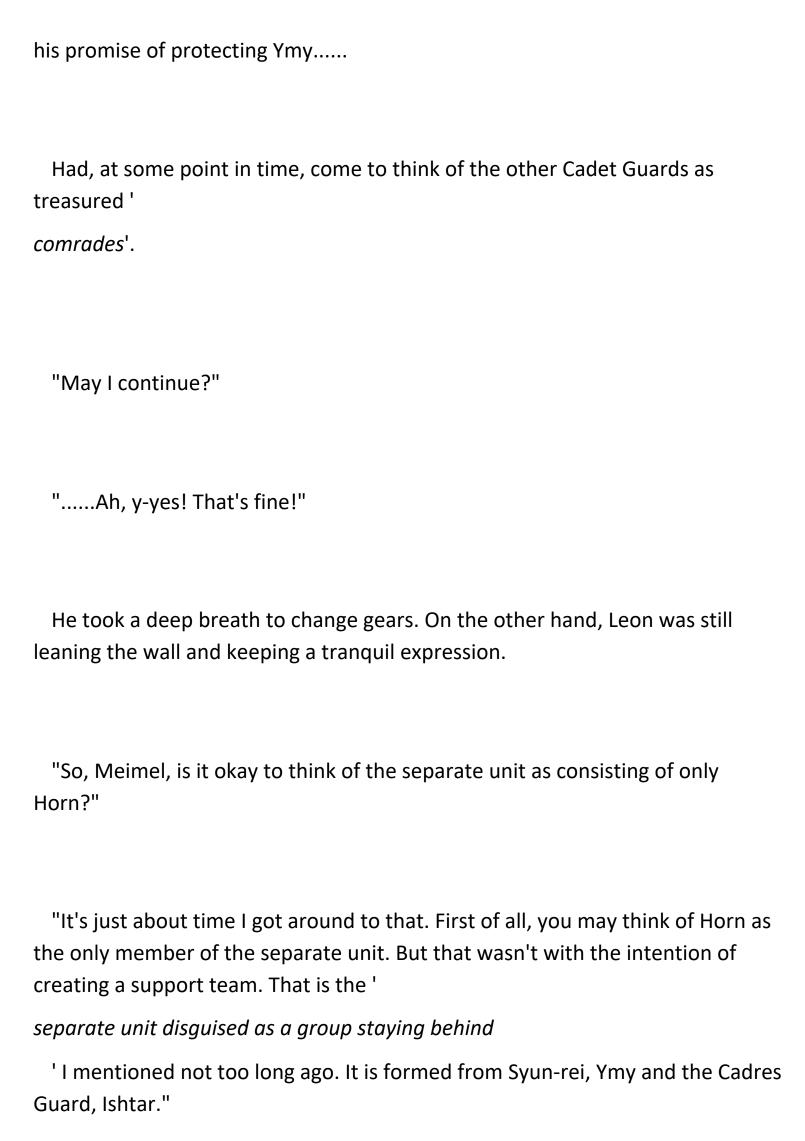
"You chose Horn, correct?"

"Yes. She has a long history of experience in patrolling the Biotope and she should be specialized in solo action. Also, above all, her combat style is decisive."

".....Ah, I get it."

Sheltis himself used dual blades and Leon used a great sword. The battle formation of the main unit was specialized in close combat. What set the empty-handed Ran and gunner Horn apart was their compatibility.
"I've only seen a little, but I think her long-range guns will be a powerful support. She should be pretty strong against enemies that Leon and I are weak against."
"Yes. That's why I settled on Horn. I haven't told the person herself yet, but that should be fine."
Click.
Meimel placed the teacup back on the table.
"That is to say. Those remaining are automatically part of those staying behind."
"I see. That's true."
Ran, Ymy, Ishtar.





"

Ahh, I might know what you mean. Remote observation using the Priestesses' clairvoyance.

11

"Correct."

Meimel clapped for machine crystal < llis> who was flashing.

"If it's Syun-rei, it should be possible to even listen in as far as the floating archipelago <Lagoon>. I'll ask her to keep watch over your actions in detail. That information will be shared with Ymy and she will relay it to myself, Ran, Viola or Cadres Guard Ishtar. If something unexpected happens, the tower's support unit will be able to immediately take action under Cadres Guard Ishtar's instructions.And this is the important part, but we will not be information the Governmental Sector of this three-person team consisting of Syun-rei, Ymy and Cadres Guard Ishtar."

"It could be construed as surveillance of '

Heaven's Wheel

', huh."

"That's it. We don't know the background of their elites. If they show any suspicious movements, we'll inform you via telepathy.....although the

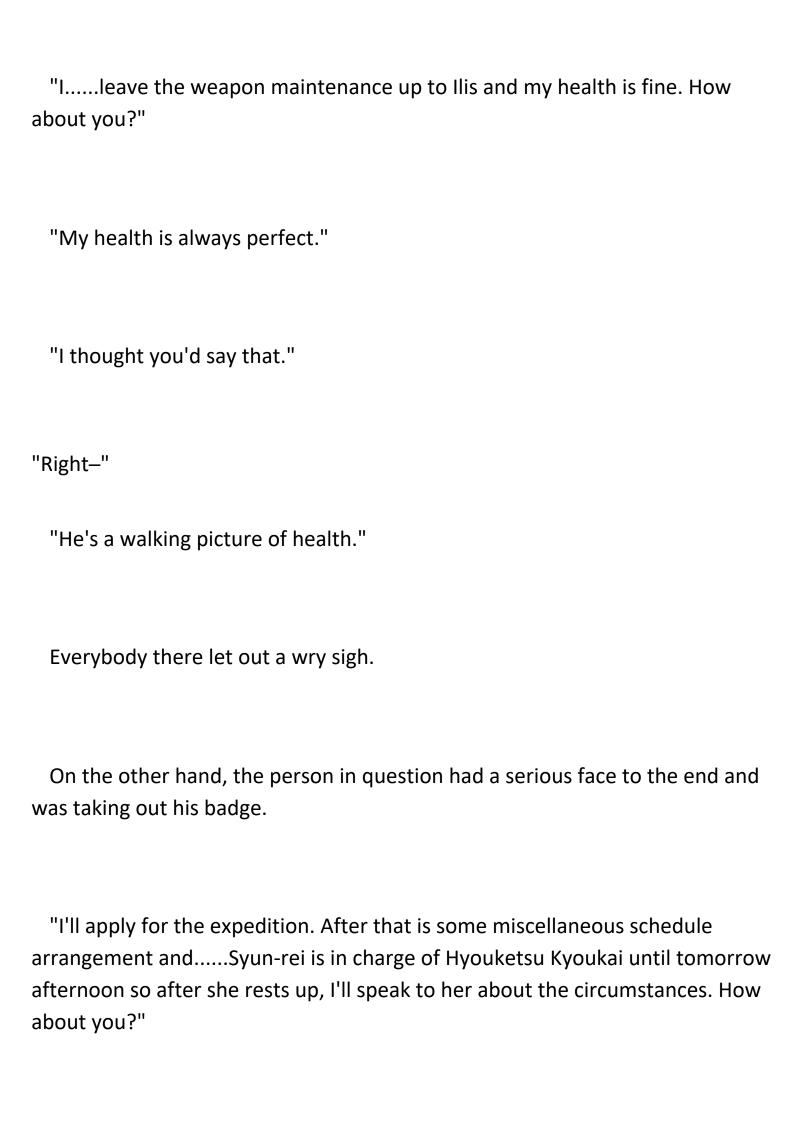
Governmental Sector knows that the Priestesses excel in such techniques so it'll be good if they don't interfere with it."
How's that? — Leon's reply was wry in response to the Priestess whose eyes were shining.
"I'm surprised."
"Oh?"
"They're words of praise. With the Governmental Sector's proposal, I wouldn't have thought you had calculated so much for the main unit, separate unit and remaining group to that extent."
"l agree."
Sheltis' and Leon's opinions were roughly the same.
m
The Governmental Sector will be heading out on a counterattack now. We'll be entering one of the bases Kuro and I found.

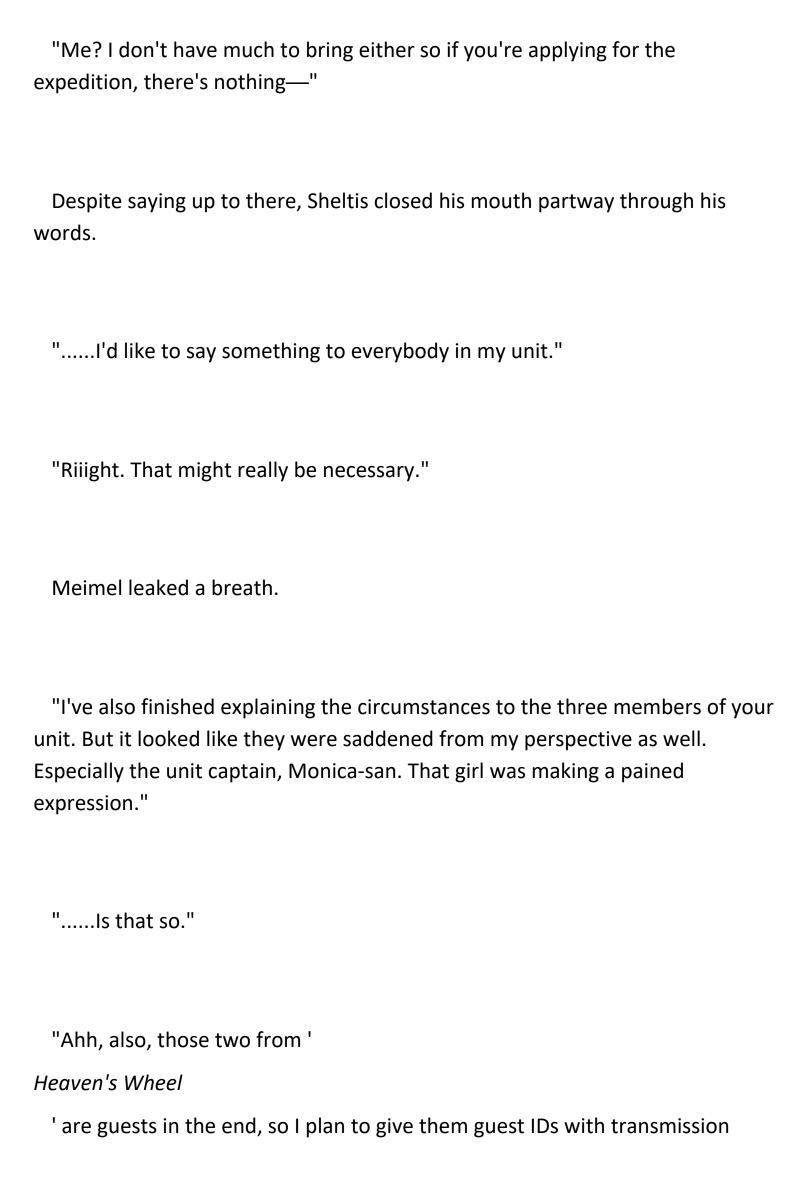
Not even an hour had passed since the Number Nine <huick>'s suggestion.</huick>	
Her skill as a Priestess is also amazing, but I think she was already a perso whose brain works fast to begin with.	'n
" Have you already spoken with everybody about this? "	
"Of course, I came here after having finished speaking to the other rooms. Cadres Guard Ishtar should be speaking with Viola and Horn about now as I requested. After that, it would be best to head out quickly like the Governmental Sector side said. The plan is for you to leave the day after tomorrow in the morning and return within the same day. I don't think you'll need to bring much but are both of you okay in terms of weapon maintenance	

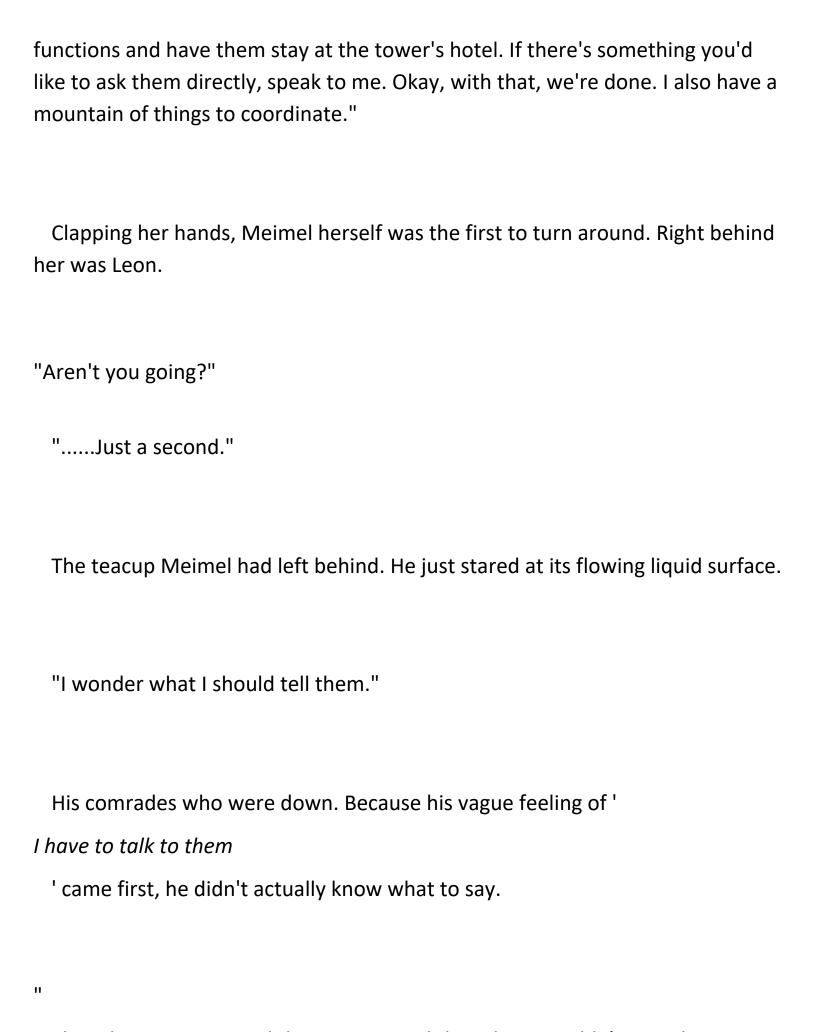
Departure on the day after tomorrow. He had expected such but it was really quick.

and health?"

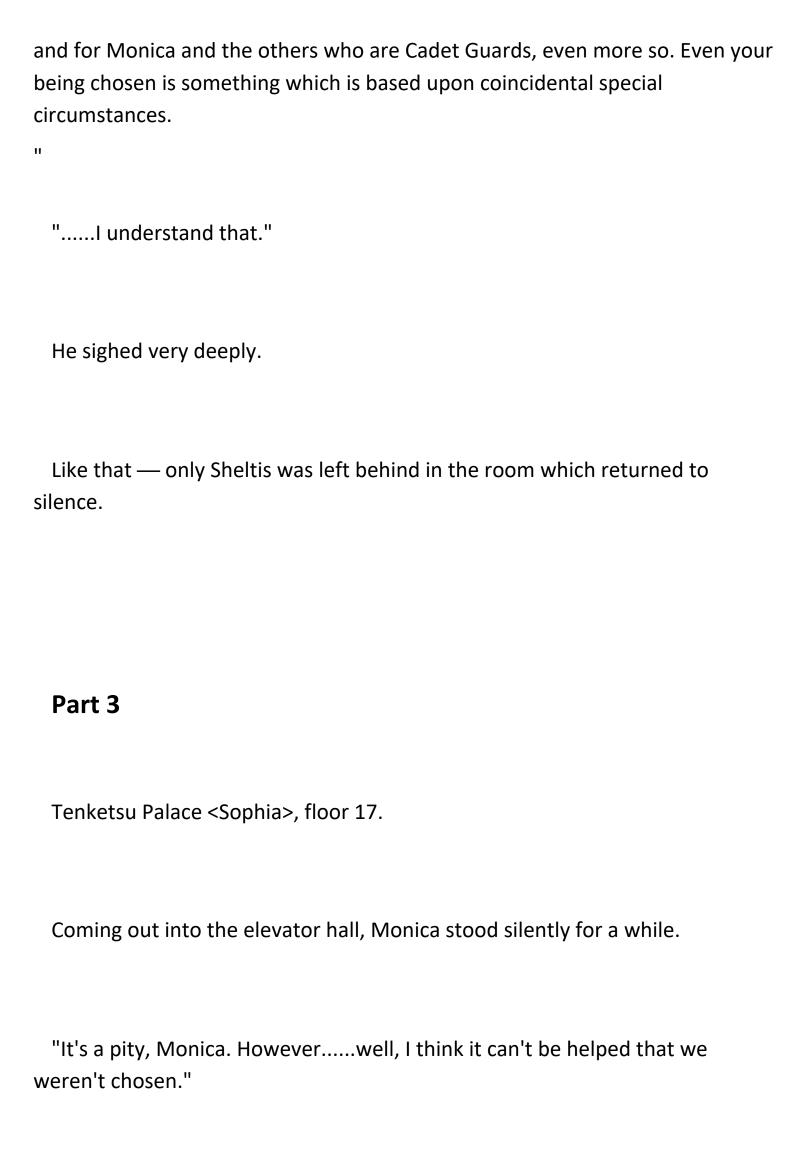
At Meimel's question, Sheltis exchanged looks with Leon who was against the wall.

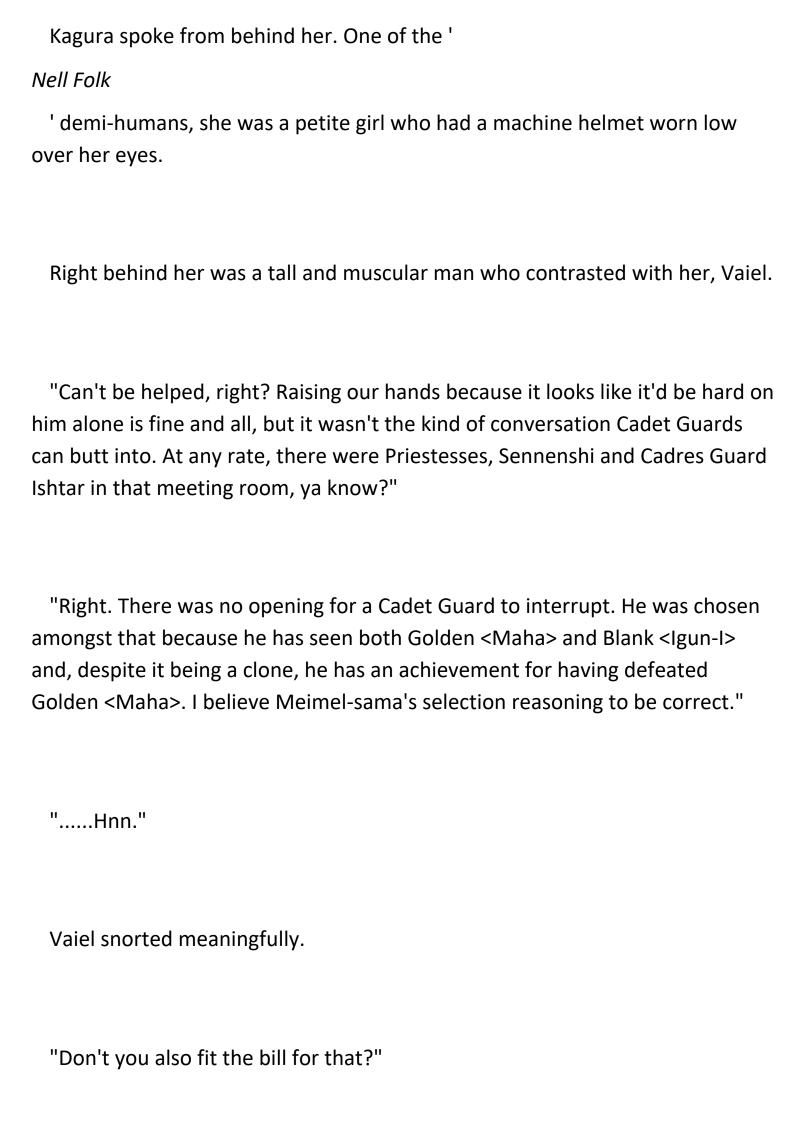


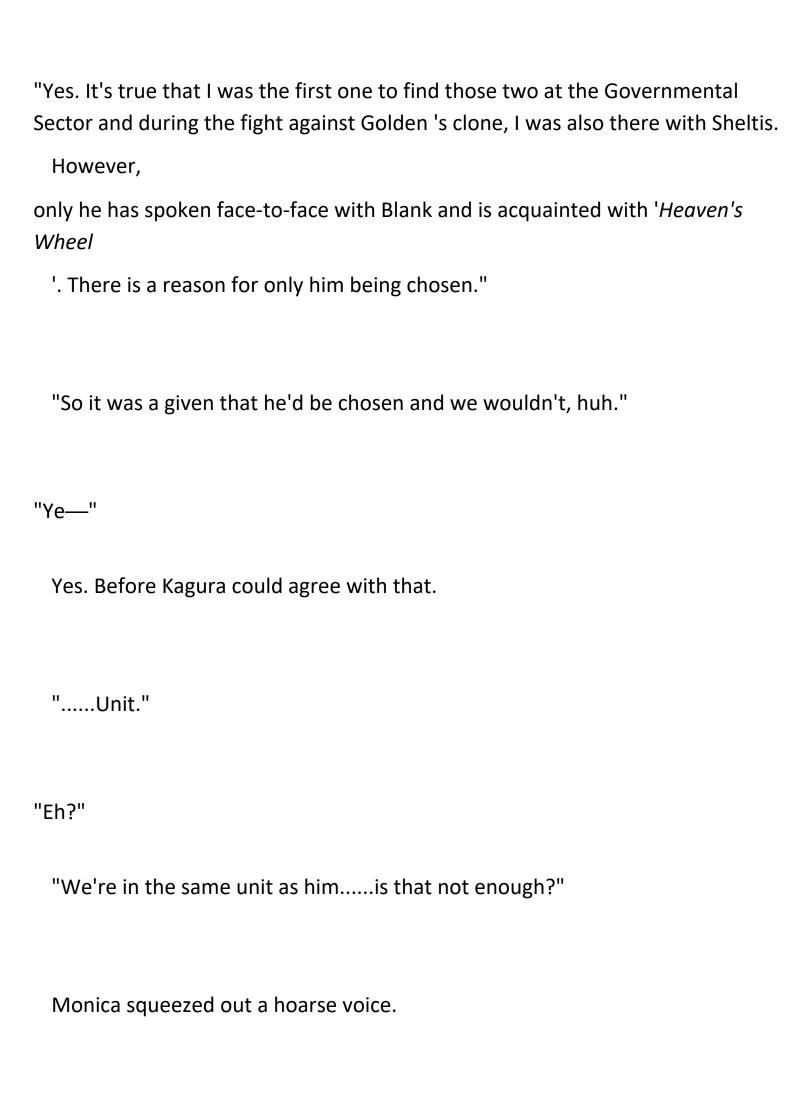


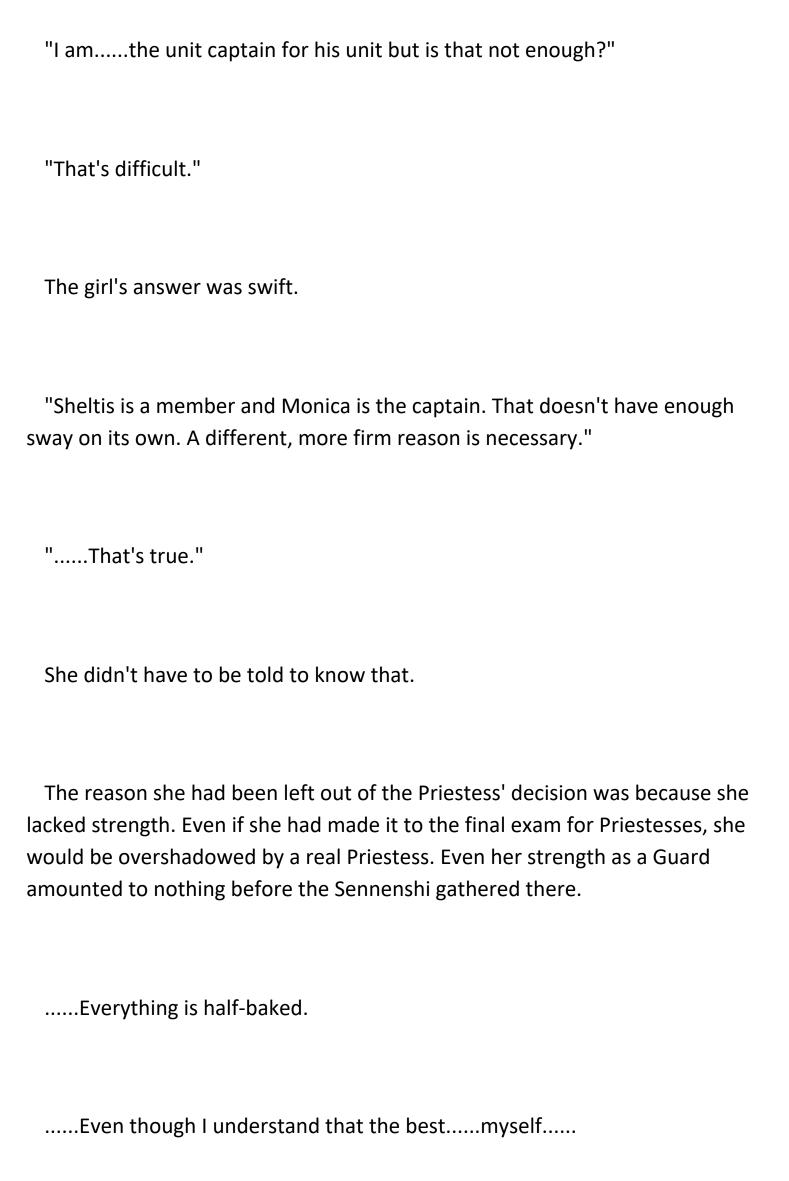


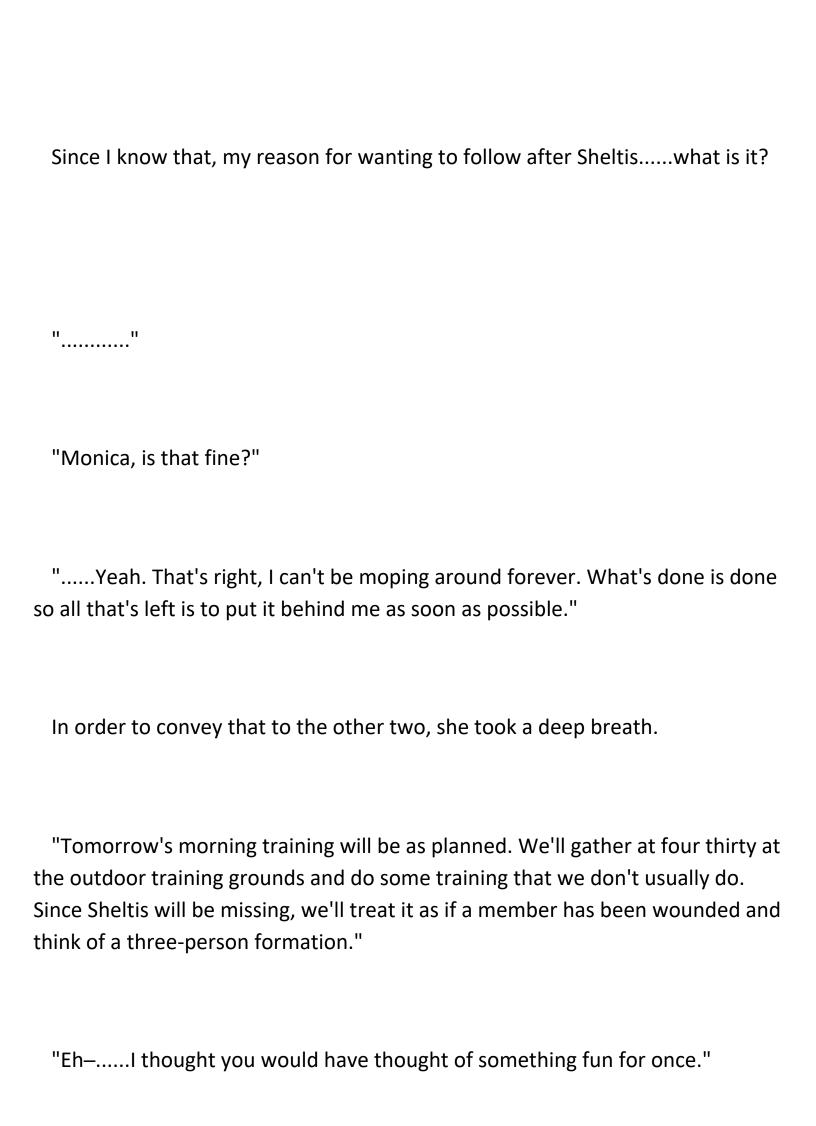
Though it was expected that Monica and the others wouldn't pass the selection. After all, it was a gathering of Priestesses, Sennenshi and the Cadres Guard, Ishtar. There wouldn't even be a place for Regular Guards to come in,

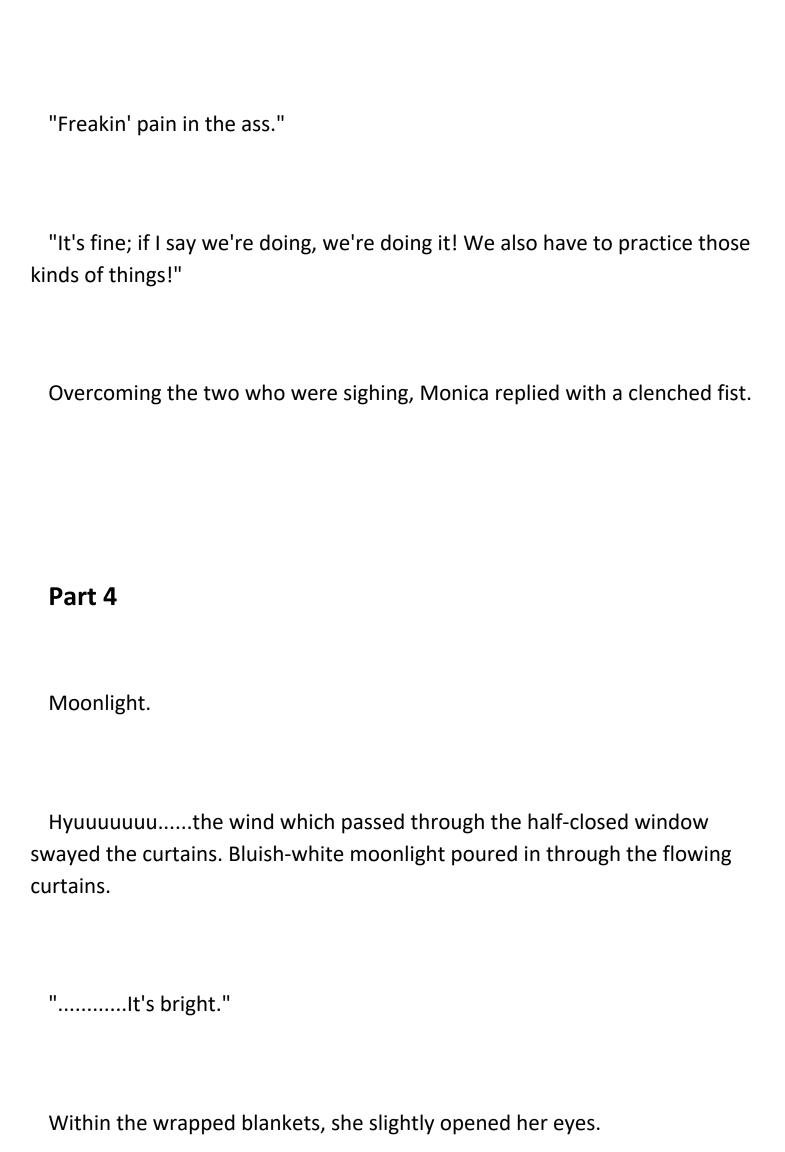












"Ahh......I forgot to close the window."

Unable to stand the moonlight's brightness which was burning her eyes,
Monica sprung out of bed. She continued forward with her pajamas disheveled,
hazy vision and tottering steps.

The window closed with a pishaa sound.

.....Okay.

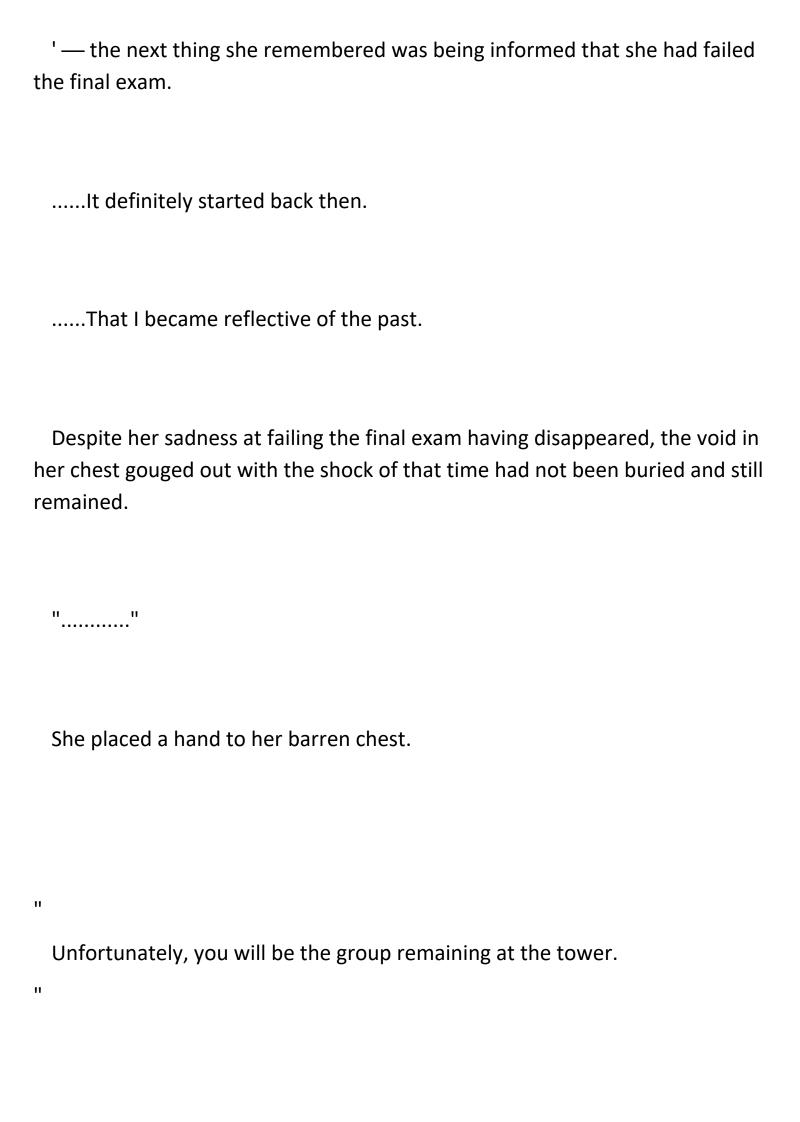
The brightness aside, there was also no fear of her shoulders getting cold from the draft. With this, she should be able to secure her precious sleep hours before the early morning training. Falling back onto the bed once again, she squirmed back into the covers and closed her eyes.



Just like that, she entered a dream as usual. Or so it should have been.
"Whycan't I sleep?"
The sound waves vibrated the stagnant air.
I can't sleep.
She still had physical and mental fatigue. Normally she would fall asleep with the speed of losing consciousness but only today was her mind so strangely awake and clear.
I wonder why.
At times like this, I only remember bad things from the past.
What she remembered most often was the final Priestess exam three years ago. From the night prior to the exam, she had set foot on the highest floor of

the tower, '

Paradise



It's nothingtodayshould be nothing major.
Compared with the final exam which was limited to a single opportunity, receiving the notification that they hadn't been selected was nothing. At best, it was a one-time thought; it was something light when considering the bitter experiences she had gone through as a Cadet Guard.
Then why am I this concerned about it?
The reason I'm concerned to the point of being unable to sleep should definitely lie there—
"We're in the same unit as himis that not enough? "
Truthfully, she didn't want to join the Governmental Sector joint unit.
But heSheltis had raised his hand signifying he wanted to go so she had thought that she had to go as well as unit captain and raised her hand.
"When did I first meet him?"

" H-Hey! Are you still free? You haven't paired up with anybody? "
Pairing up by chance for the pair unit battle as two people who hadn't found partner was the occasion. After that, they went together with Captain Leon to the floating archipelago <lagoon>.</lagoon>
"You should just make a new unit."
As Instructor Yumelda said, they began searching for members in a unit consisting of only the two of them. He and I created this unit. That's why, no matter what, I can't think of acting as a unit without himhowever.
For it to be this rough on me just being away from him for several days.
Is that really the only reason?

а

The boy with an air which resembled the dual swords user she admired.
While operating as a unit together with him, a single feeling had sprouted. But the feeling was not admiration.

It's not admiration.
•••••
"No matter how you look at ita crushhuh."
She didn't know what she liked.
She didn't think it was her being attracted to something special. However — despite it only being for several days, she couldn't suppress her anxiety at him being apart from the unit.
II II



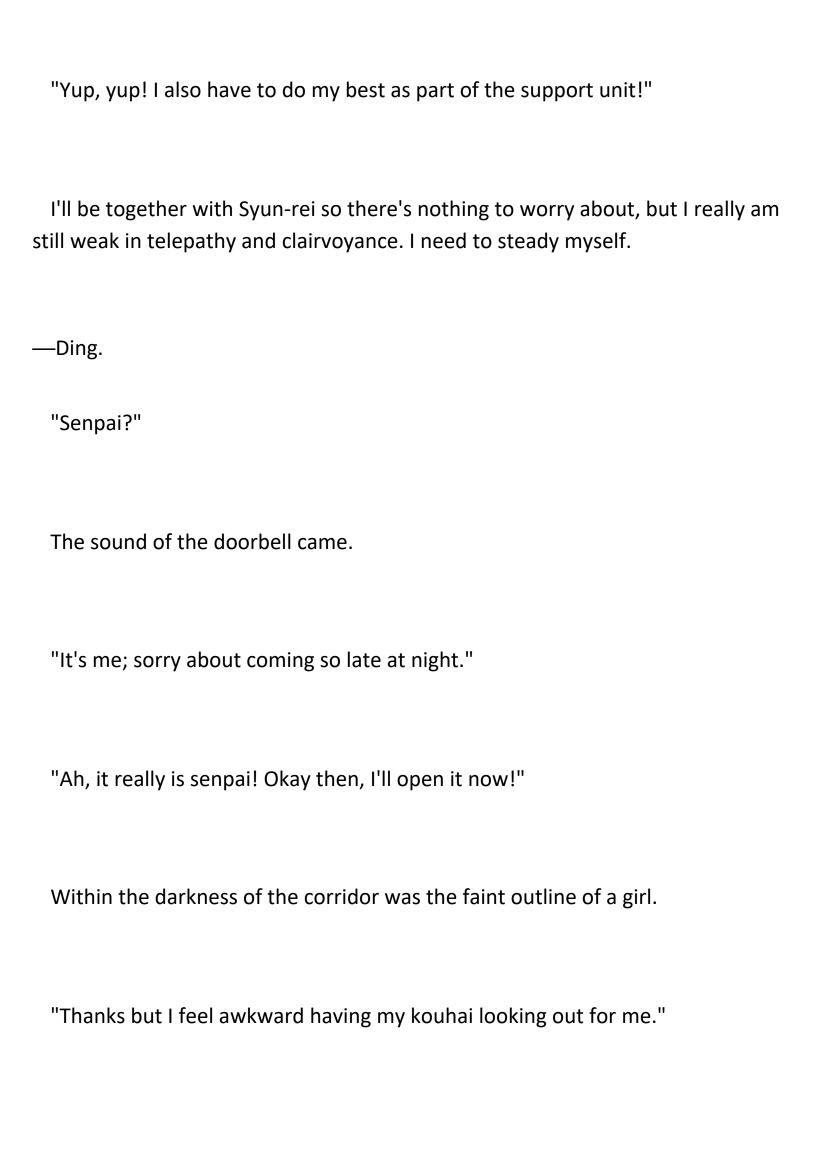


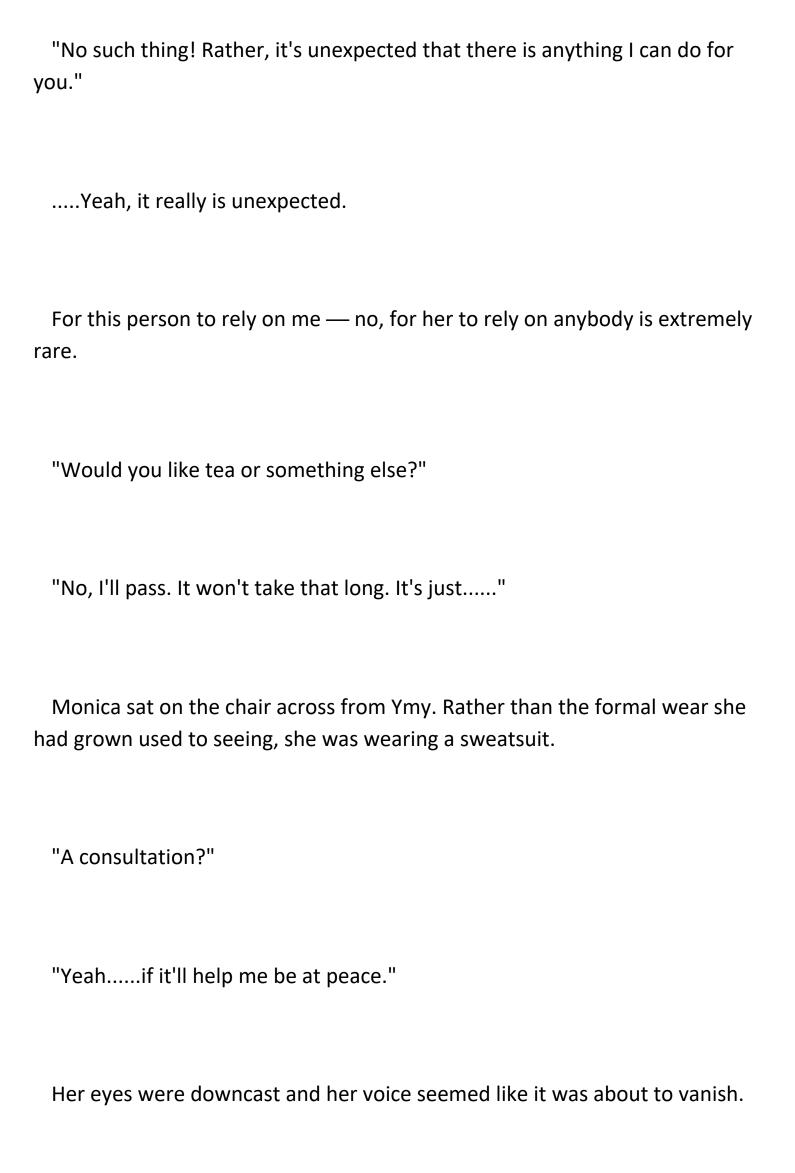
"You'll listen to my worries?"
"Ah, n-no! That would be impertinent of meI was just thinking about if there was anything. I think it would be best to let those loose instead of keeping them inside you."
II
I wonder if that's true.
But this aching that won't let me sleep will probably continue from when he leaves to when he comes back. I'm already like this before he departswhat will happen tomorrow or the day after.
The void in her chest ached harder and harder.
II II
"Senpai?"

"Could I come over there right now?"
Part 5
Tenketsu Palace <sophia>, floor 287.</sophia>
This floor which contained the Priestesses' private rooms quietly became quiet as if to match with the darkness of night.
There was not a single person. With the consideration of not disturbing the Priestesses' sleep, staff did not go to this floor at night. Security as well. To begin with, operation of the private elevator was required and that could only be operated by tower staff's electronic identification keys.
In the off chance that an enemy from outside were to infiltrate, the Priestesses had the Sennenshi with them. That was why the Priestess floor was devoid of people and always filled with silence.
"I wonder if senpai will be here soon."

In the living space of the room, Ymy was propped up on her hands, leaning on the table.
She was still wearing her Priestess vestments. Though that was because she had been together with Meimel and Leon until this late having a discussion.
"Tomorrow, hmmmm."
The joint unit between the Governmental Sector and Tenketsu Palace <sophia> would deploy.</sophia>
The main unit would consist of the Number Nine <huick> from '</huick>
Heaven's Wheel
' and his assistant, Kuro, as well as Sheltis and Leon. It was decided the separate unit would have the Sennenshi, Horn. Moreover, there would be a remote support unit consisting of herself and Syun-rei relaying information by clairvoyance and telepathy. It seemed that Cadres Guard Ishtar would also be on standby to move her subordinates at a moment's notice.
It's kind of an amazing gathering.
It was weird for her to say it as one of the members, but pretty much all members participating in the plan were representatives of the floating







"Senpai, that's not like you. You have to be more like zing! Come and talk with me about anything. Don't hold back!"
[T/N: Zing being a sound effect here to indicate a sharpness. It's referencing her serious personality.]
"G-Got it"
Monica squirmed around and shifted her position in the seat many, many times.
"It's about what happened at noon. One of our unit's members was selected for the joint unit between Tenketsu Palace <sophia> and the Governmental Sector. His name is Sheltis."</sophia>
"Yes. I was also there."
Coincidences are amazing.
She had been thinking of him herself just now.

"It's amazing. A Cadet Guard was chosen out of all those present. As for



that was definitely my meeting with him, I think."
II II
"As you said, Sheltis is amazing. I'm interested in what he did before but I won't ask if he won't talk about it. Rather than that, I'd like to cherish how much he's helped me."
"That's rightI think."
A single droplet of sweat drew a thin thread-like line down her cheek and fel to her lap.
What?
Whatis thisstrange feeling?
SomehowI have a bad premonitioneven though I'm just listening to what senpai wants to say, why do I feel this cold?

"It started when we fought against the Yuugenshu and I received

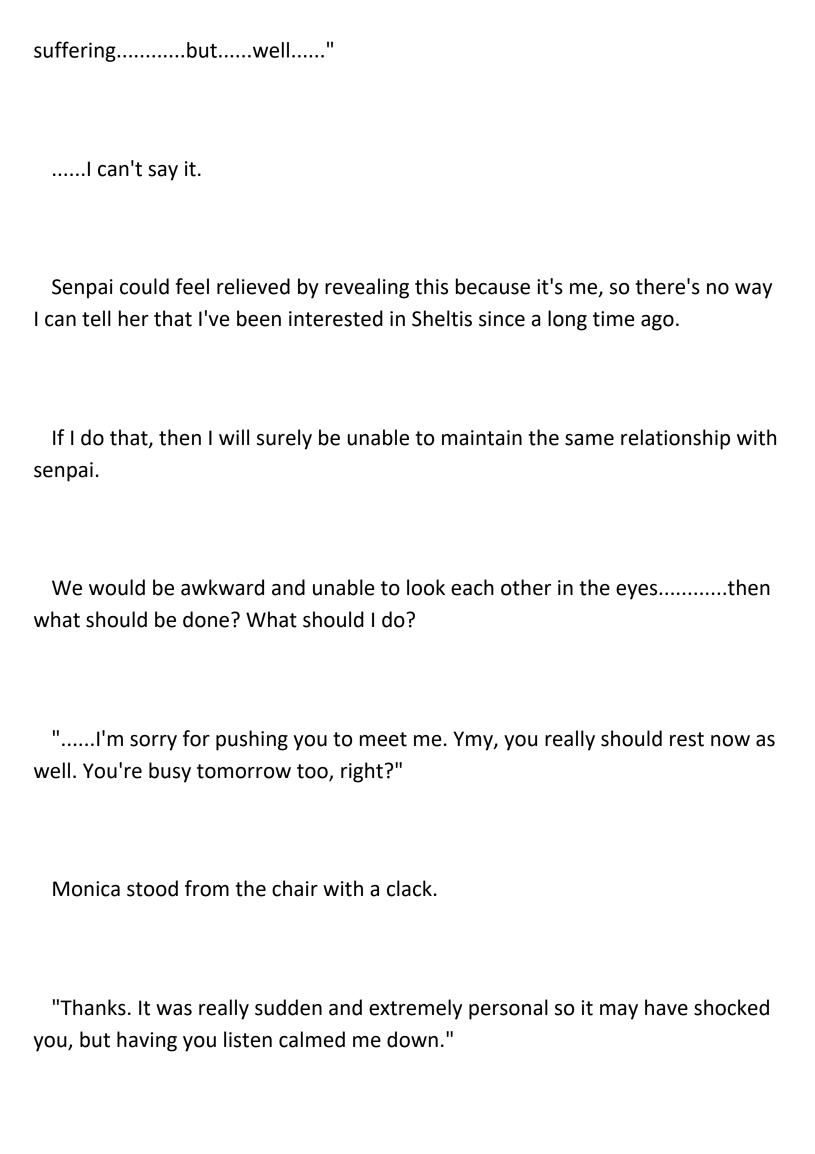


The reason for Monica's expression. The meaning for her embarrassed and happy expression.
Only that is
Even if it's senpai, only that is
"Your feelings?"
"Yeah."
Monica put a hand to her chest and took a deep breath. Then—
No.
Stop itonly thatpleasenoooo!

"St---"

"It looks like I've fallen for him."
Within her heart, she heard the sound of something bursting.
Ah.
Ahhahh
"Ymy?"
п <u></u> п
Facing her, Monica was saying something.
Butnomyhead is completely blank and I can't think. I have to say iteven though I need to say it.
"Uhummm."

"Mm?"
"II too"
I also think of Sheltis more than anybody else.
That's whyI need to say itor if Monica-senpai really confesses to Sheltiswhat would happen?
Monica-senpai is a wonderful person even from my point of view.
And she's able to meet and speak with him every day as part of the same unit She can be much closer to him than I can right now. More than Imore than I who can't even touch him with a single finger because of Elbert resonancemuch, much more"
II II
"Ymy, what's wrong? It really must be because you're up this late."
"Ahh, that'sthat's not it! It's not that my health is



"Ahh, senpai, wait, wa——"
Wait! She intended to shout that at the back heading towards the door but only a strained breath came out in reality.
II II
The girl left the room. The room's door was shut.
Left all alone in her room, Ymy idly stood still.
My legs won't move.
Nor my arms, fingers, neck, shoulders, everything; it feels like they're not part of me.
A doll whose heart has been stolen.
"Why."



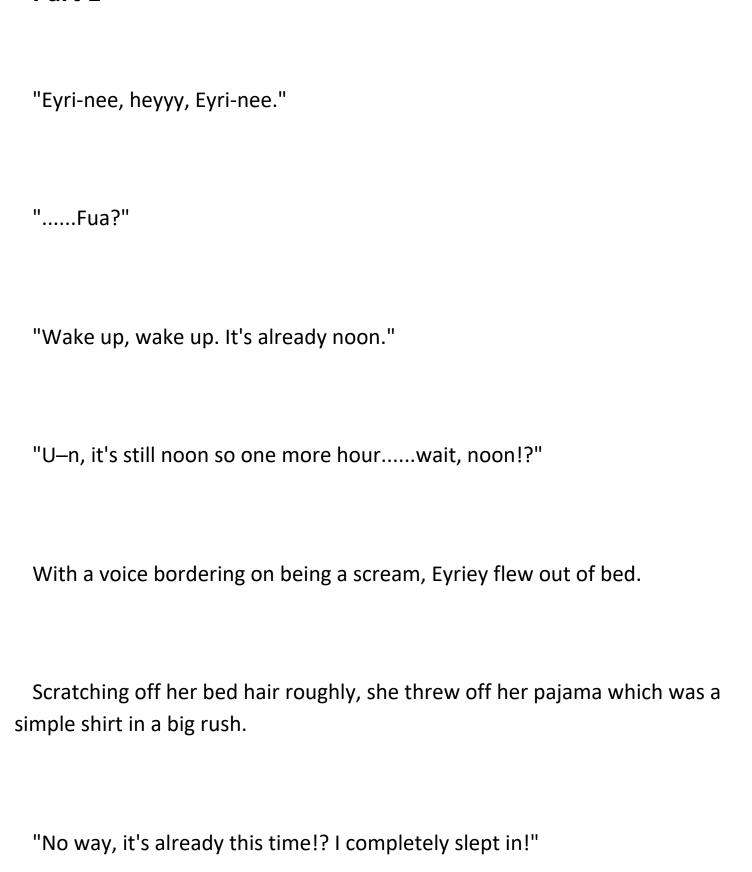
What should I d	do?

".....!"

Leaking out a wordless cry, Ymy collapsed at that spot.

Chapter 2 - Those Who Set Off. Those Who Wish. Those Who Continue to Pray

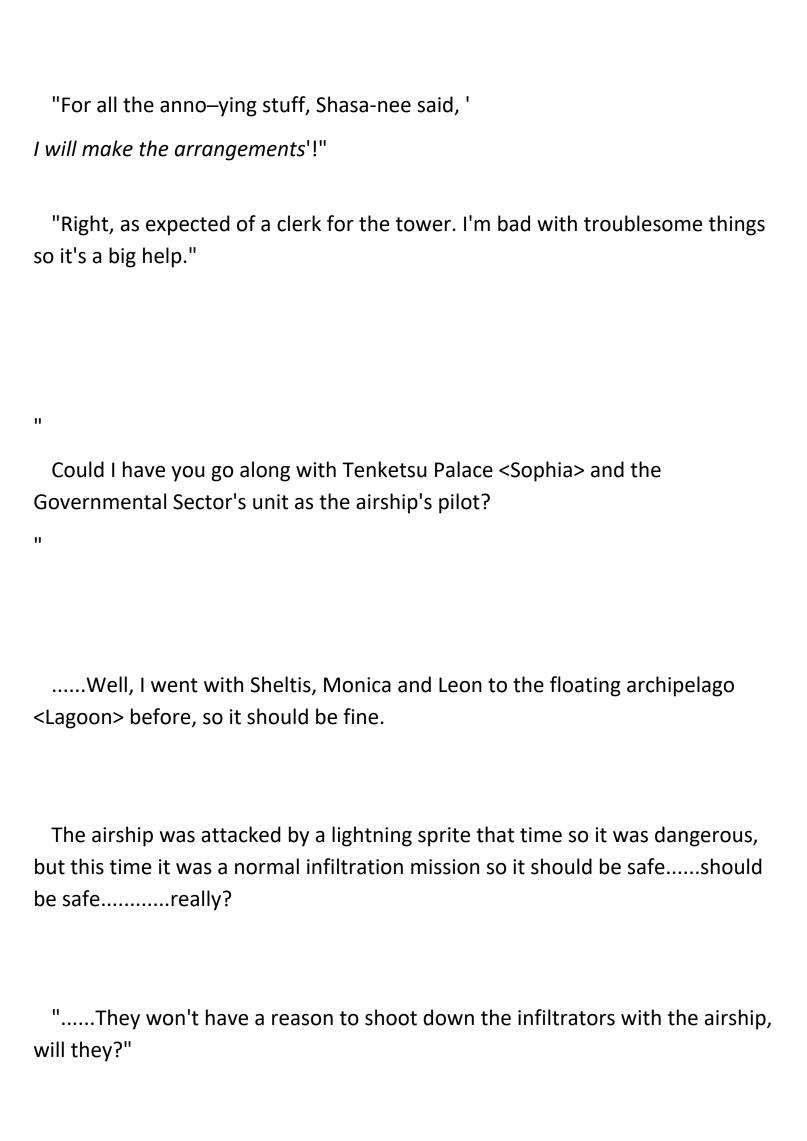
Part 1



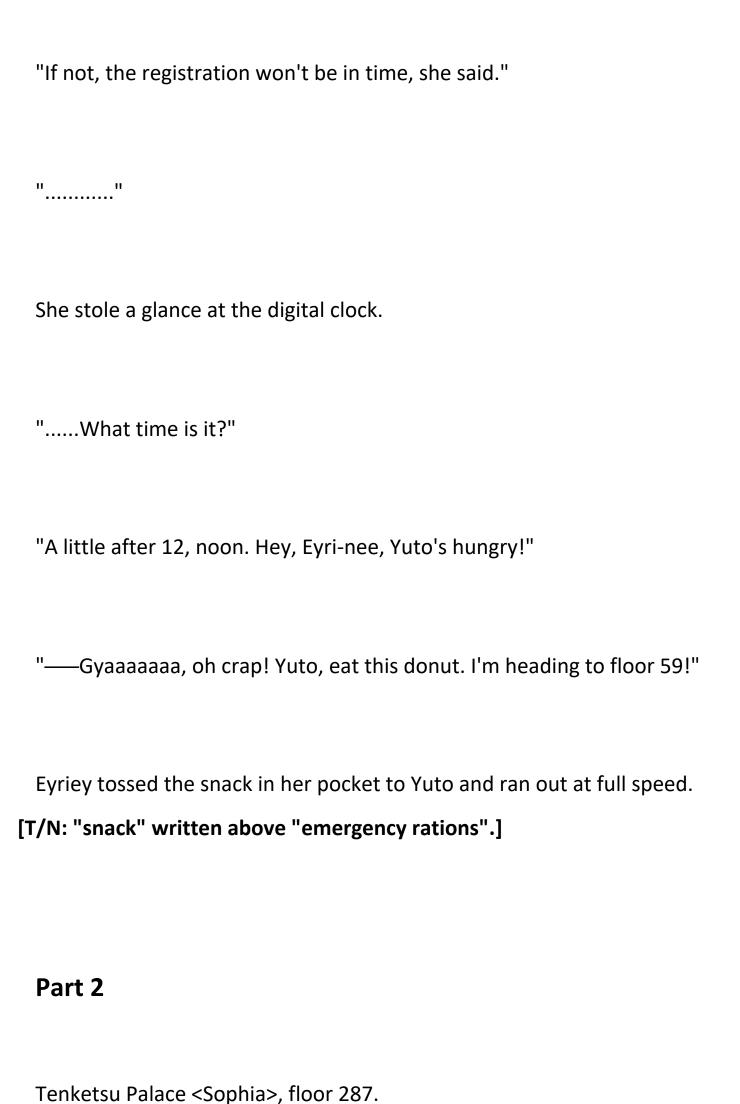


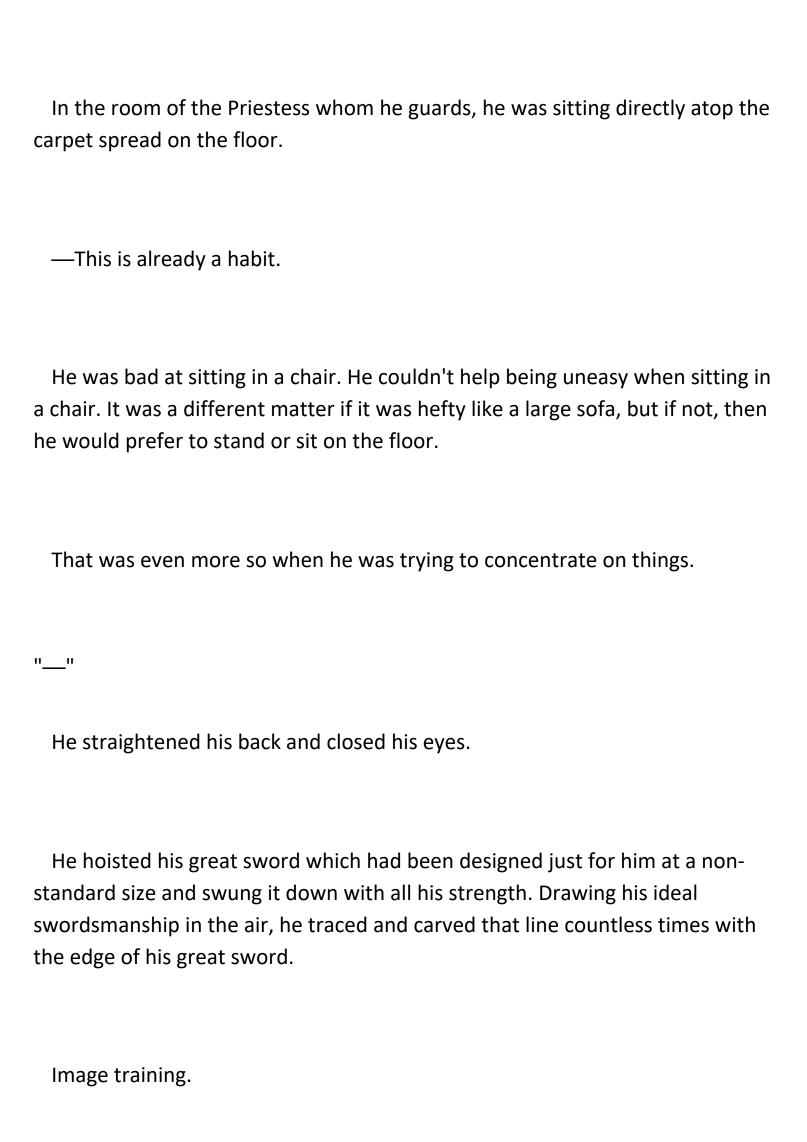
"Ah, right, right. You had a meeting with Shasa-chan." Her notebook had fallen beside the pillow.Ahh, I was confirming the details of our meeting.....and fell asleep like that, huh. "Eyri-nee, Eyri-nee! Yuto also pro-perly kept a ' memo '. See, ' Early in the morning, I take off on an airship together with Eyri-nee!'." "Oh-, that's amazing, Yuto; I also made absolutely certain to write it down. At any rate, Shasa-chan said we couldn't meet her at work today." Turning over the notebook, she flipped to the page with a large tag attached. "Hrm? For the day before's preparations, it's ' my luggage 'so I guess that's pretty much snacks. Next is a first-class airship pilot's license and that's in my pocket, so that's all good. Next is.....what, it's just to head to floor 59's mechanical bureau's airship department and do the procedure. After

that, we just have to go to the airport on floor 65."



"Eyri-nee!"
Yuto was jumping around on the sofa and used the rebound force off the cushion to make a big jump. With that, she hugged onto her shoulders.
"Eyri-nee, Shasa-nee said, ' It'll be fine if it's Eyriey!'."
"Mu, true. I feel like it'll somehow work out. Well then, let's make sure to transport Sheltis and the others! I got paid too, after all."
"Oh-!"
While holding onto Yuto, she sank into the sofa.
"With that decided, right now we should go to the mechanical bureau's airship division and submit an airship pilot application. When did Shasa said we had to go?"
"4 AM."
II II





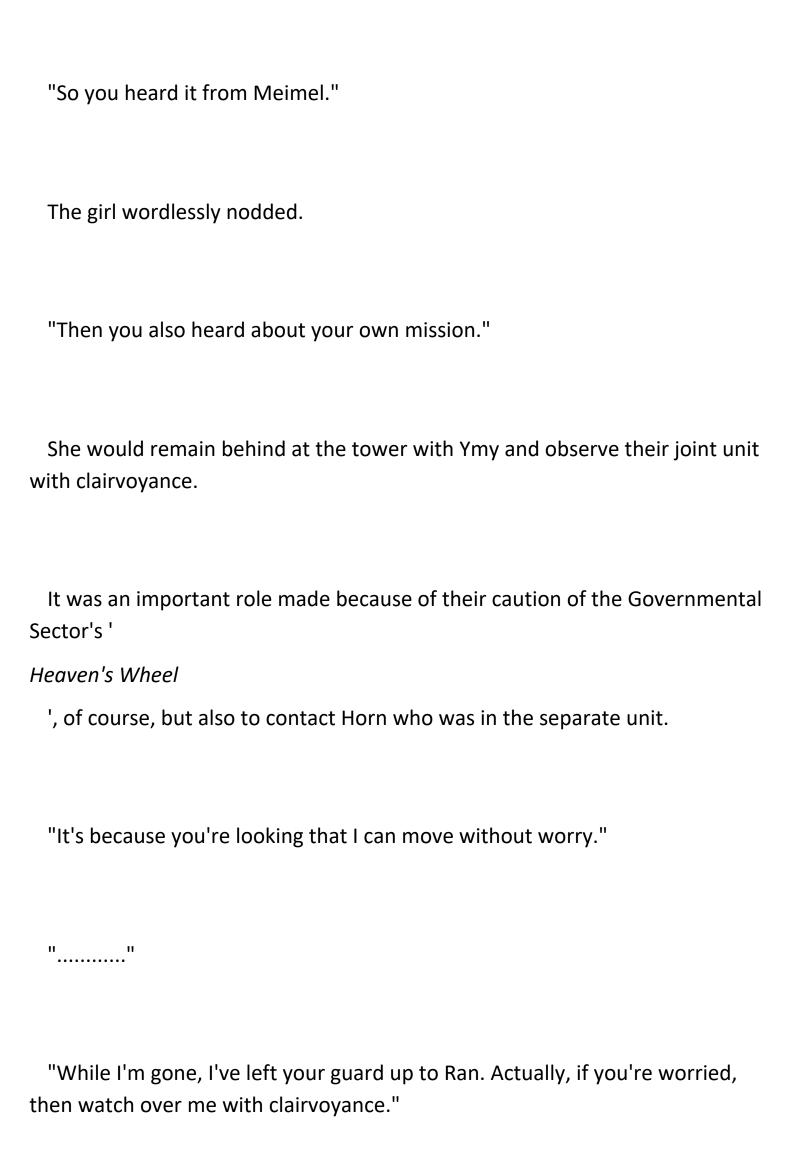
It was something he did when he couldn't leave his Priestess' side in place of actual training.
There's still room to improve my swordsmanship.
I can become stronger.
In the back of his mind was the figure of another person who lined up directly beside him. At times, it was Sheltis, and at others, it was his coworkers like Ran or Horn.
I wonder if I can surpass my ideal.
Surpass my older brother.
No matter how much he polished his sword skills, the distance between his ideal and himself never shortened. To close that gap even by one centimeter, by one millimeter, he continued to swing his sword in the back of his mind—

".....Leon."

That scenery vanished like mist in an instant.
"Are you going tomorrow?"
Atop the bed and lying down was a girl with a listless expression which he could see from the side. It wasn't that she didn't get up. Leon knew that she didn't even have the energy to get up.
"Syun-rei, it's okay if you don't try to force yourself to get up. Sleep for today. I will be here."
II

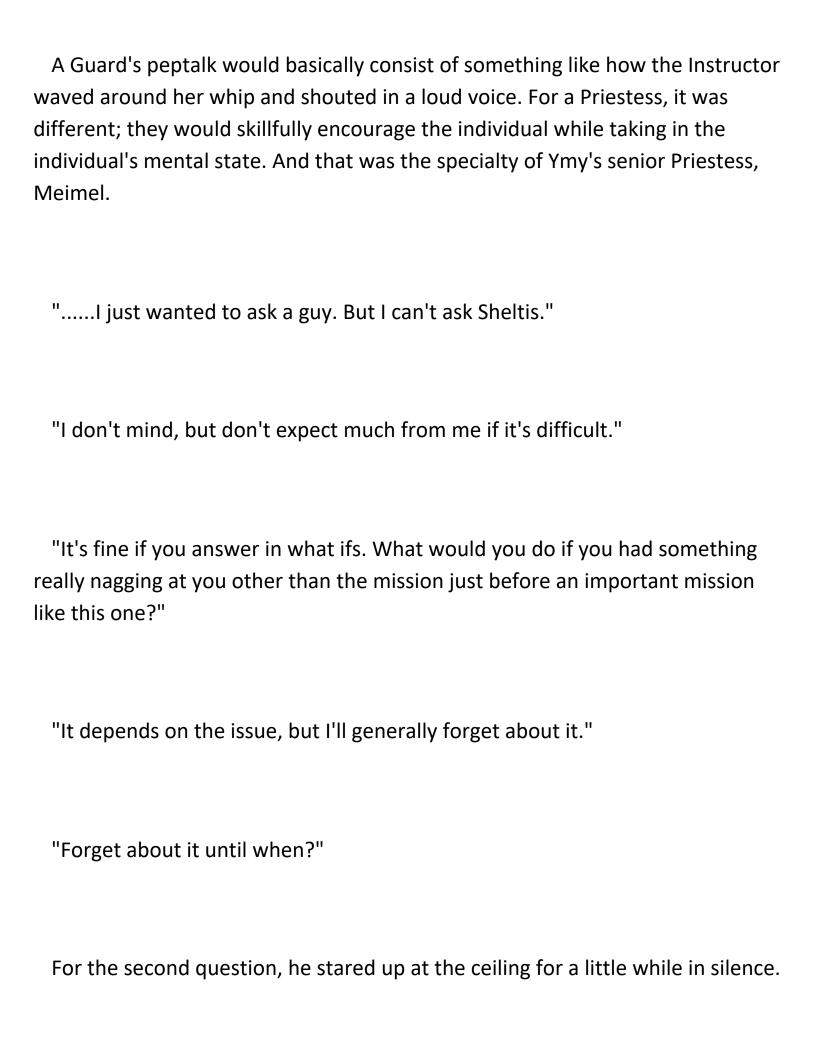


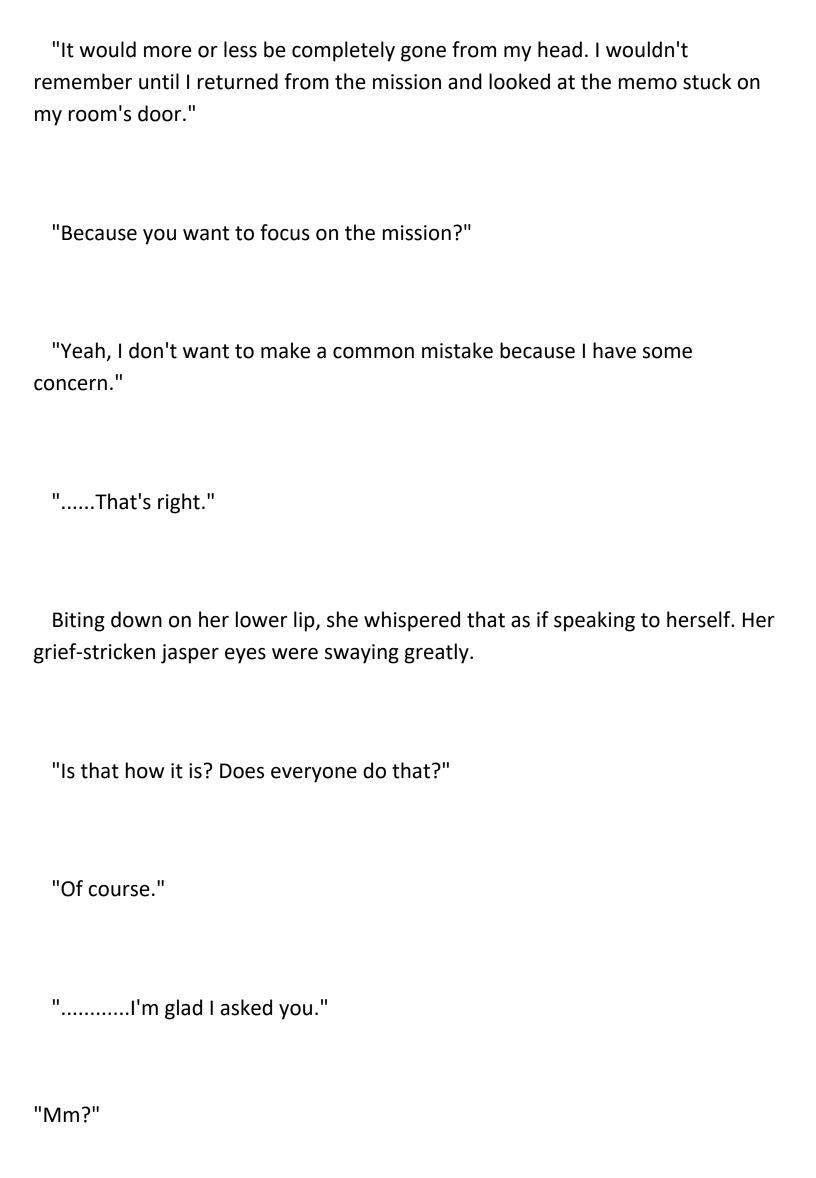
The girl had continued to pray for Hyouketsu Kyoukai for three days.
It had only been three hours since she had entrusted authority to Queen Salah again. Her stamina depleted, normally she would fall into a sleep so deep that she wouldn't wake up no matter what happened.
"Meimel said it. That you're going together with people from the Governmental Sector."
"That's right."
Meimel had sent her the information by telepathy while she was praying for the barrier. Syun-rei already knew that he would be heading for the third organization.
"Are you going?"
—Are you leaving me and going?
The black-haired girl's wavering eyes were conveying that.



II II
"Putting aside success or failure, we'll be departing tomorrow and be gone for the dayand come back in the morning the day after. I'll be back soon so just rest yourself here at the tower."
"Yeah."
The edges of her mouth loosened slightly — with that expression, she once again went to sleep. Yes, she should be too tired to even open her eyes.
That's just how worried she is.
Unrelated to shinryoku, Syun-rei's danger sense was sharp. It had been rare for her to worry this much even as of late.
"There might be one or two problems, huh. Did you perhaps come because you were worried about that too?"
"I don't know why either."





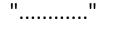


"No, it's just me talking to myself. I just thought I was glad to have asked you. I believed that you would say it straight like this." Ymy rubbed her shaded eyes and took a deep breath. "Okay, I worried about it for an entire night, but that's no good! It's not like me! I'll keep myself from thinking about the thing with Monica-senpai until the day after tomorrow. Yup, yup, I need to concentrate on the important mission ahead of me right now. You can do it, me. Go for—" ".....Ymy, please be a little quieter." ".....I'm sorry." Having been scolded by Syun-rei who was lying atop the bed, Ymy meekly bowed her head.

Part 3

The heat wave scorched the earth bit by bit.

They walked endlessly with heavy equipment backpacks upon their backs across the desert which extended to the visible horizon. Their luggage included a week's worth of rations, tents, emergency clothes, communicators, etc. Their combined weight exceeded that of a grown male's.



"...."

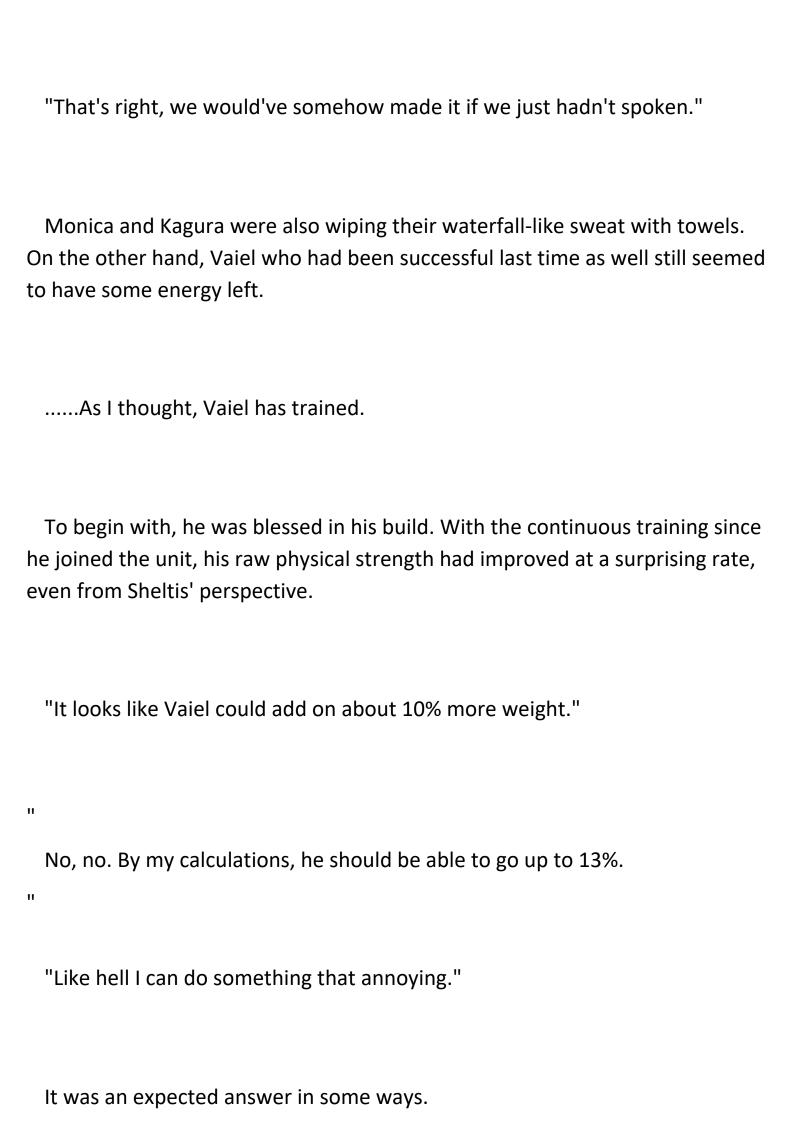
Nobody said a word. Careful not to deplete even a tiny bit of their stamina, they simply continued forward and onward. Finally, ahead of their forced marched, they could faintly confirm a single white line close to the ground.

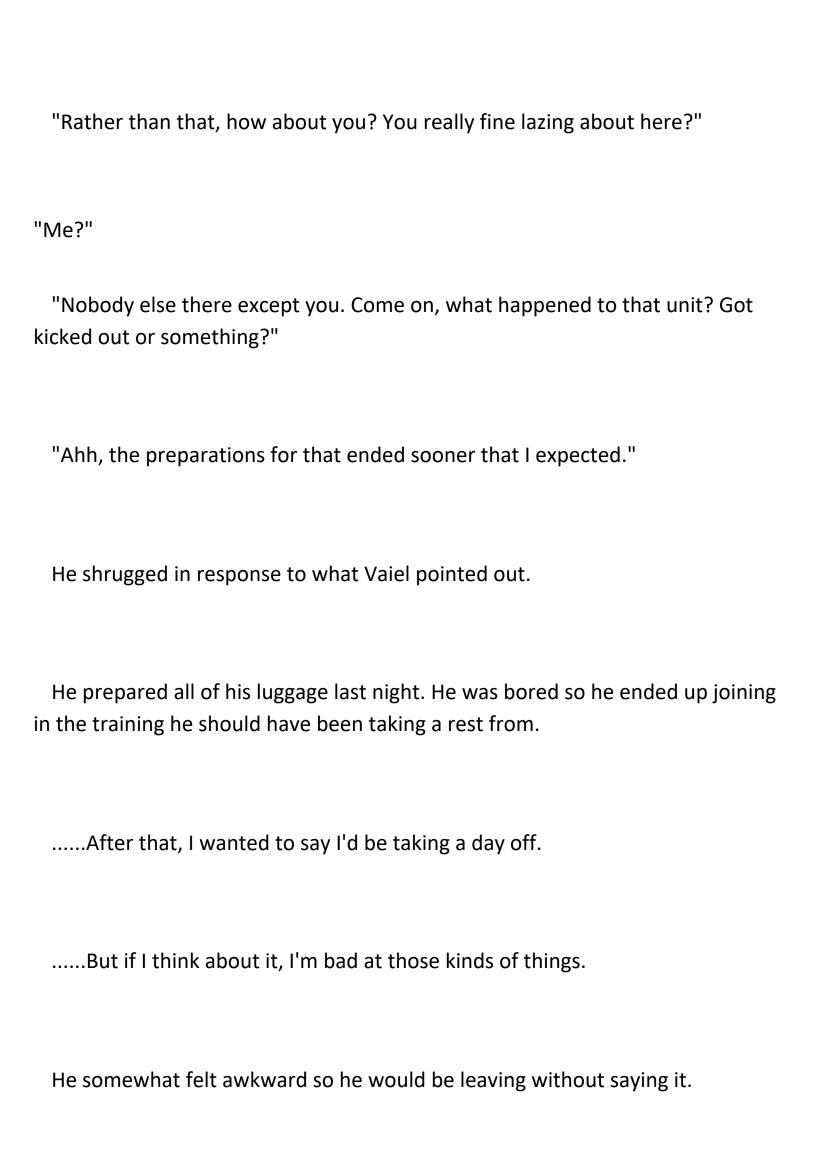
"__"

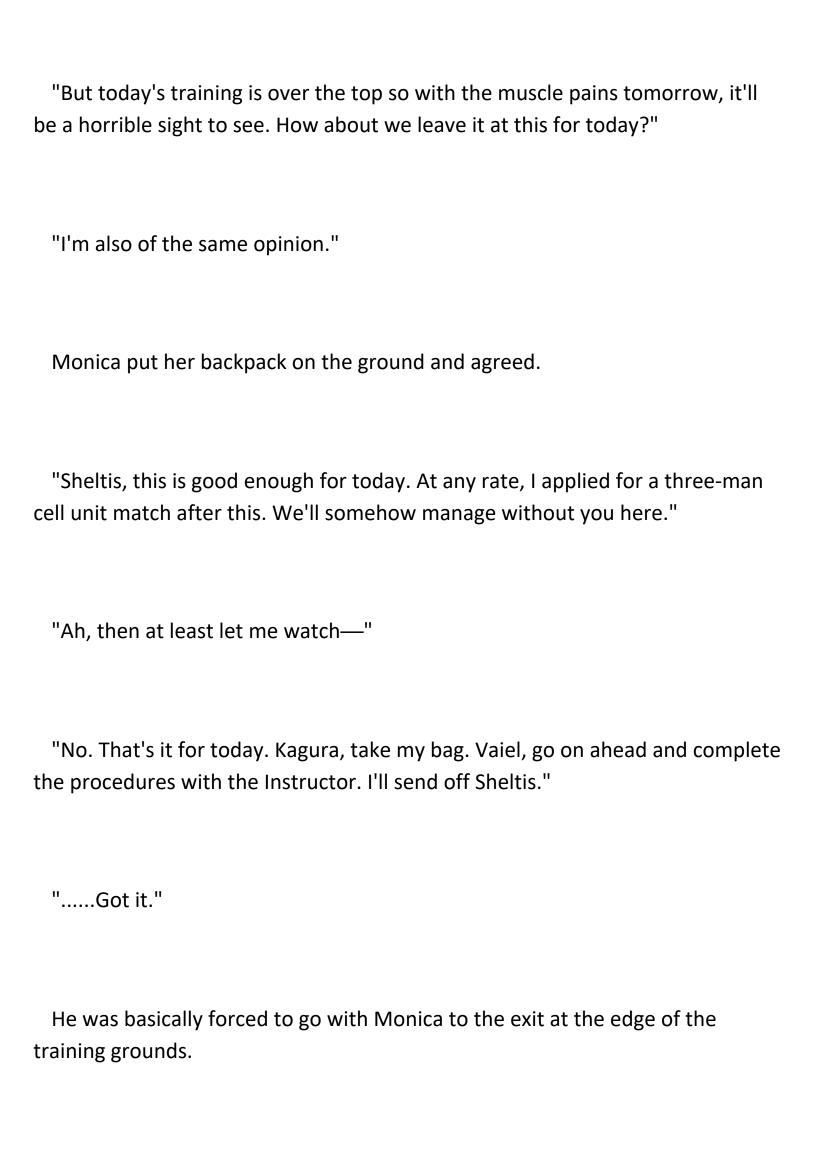
The unit's spiritless pace quickened. They continued wordlessly for another five minutes and finally, the girl at the head of the unit crossed over the white line—

"——Journey......complete!"

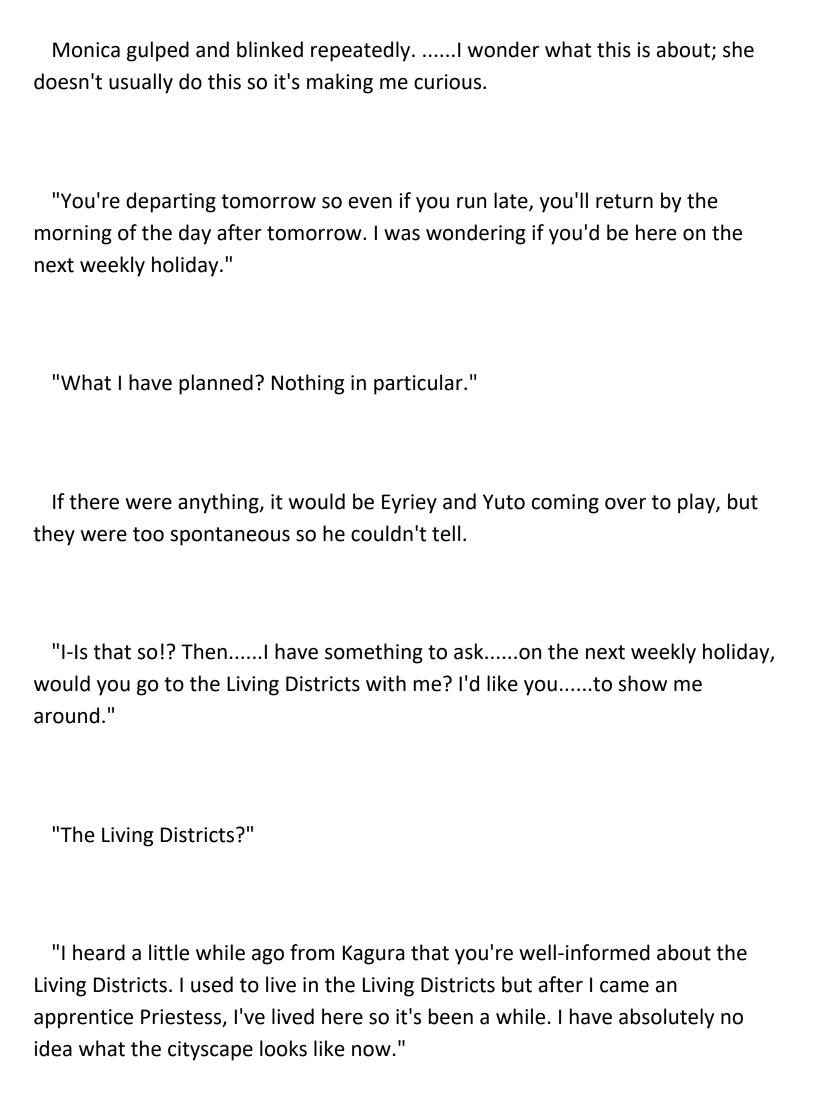


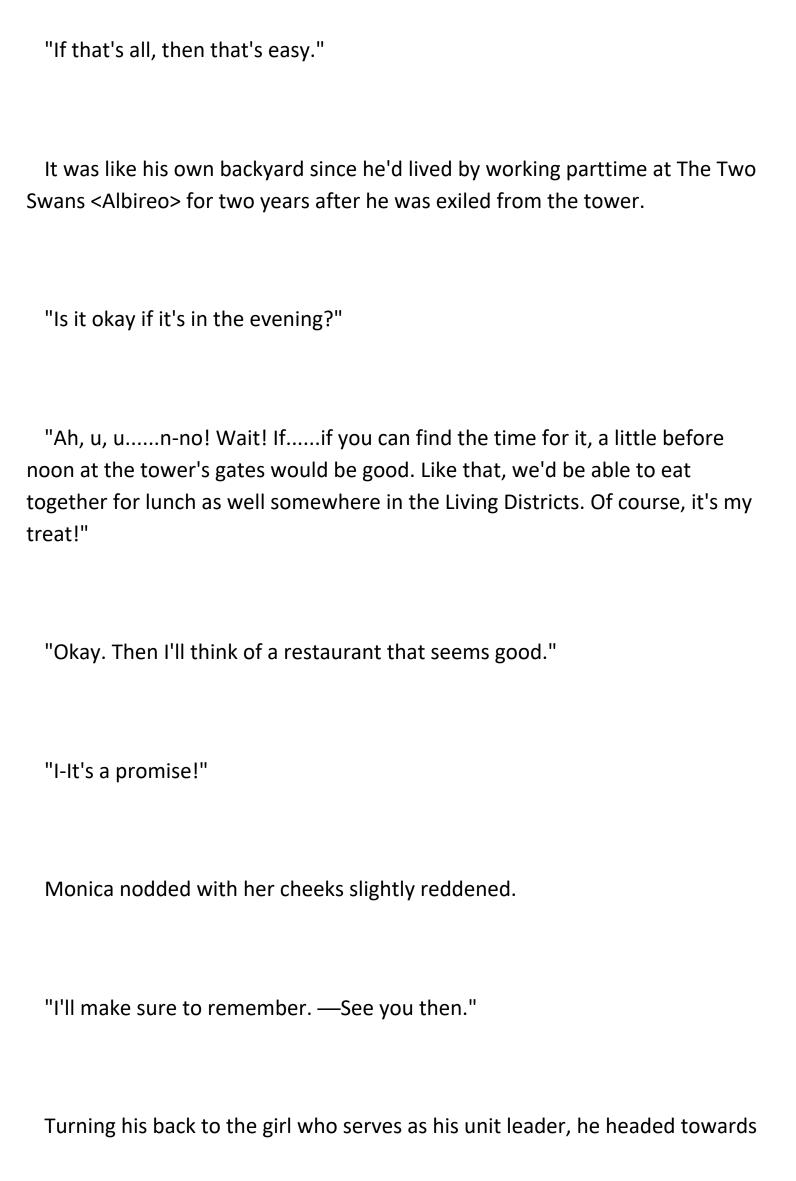


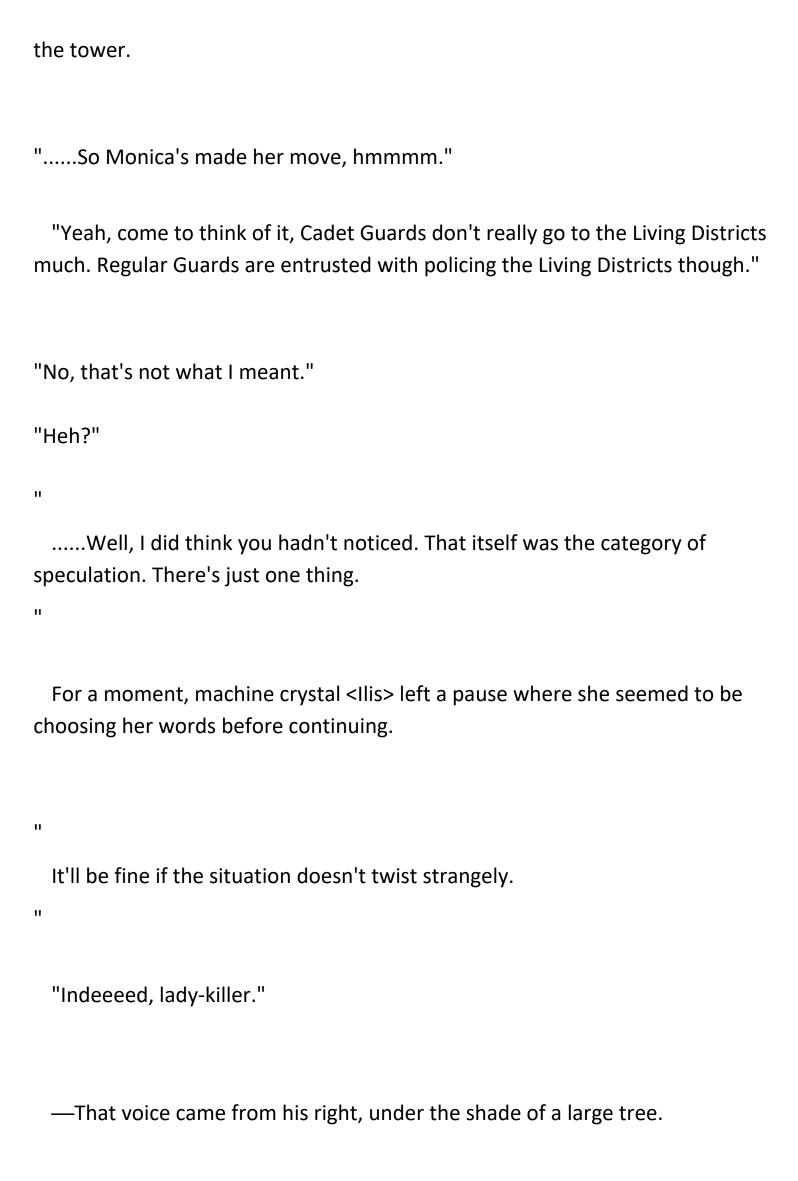












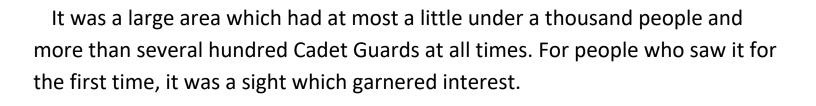
"You are"
Appearing casually from the shade was a tall, lean man with a sunny expression. He had a dark brown jacket over a light brown shirt and pants that matched in color. In contrast with his clothes that couldn't be called flashy, The greatly distorted rim of his cowboy hat was distinctive.
"We met just yesterday, but are you doing good? But ya know, nii-chan, you sure can do it even with that docile face. Right at high noon in that kind of atmosphere planning to go with a girl on a da—ugefuu!?"
"Huick-sama, thoughtless conversation is strictly forbidden."
"Th-Thoughtless, you sayand what did you hit me with just now? It was harder than usual."
"The edge of this suitcase."

That hurts — the Ninth <Huick> sighed while pressing on his flank. The suited woman standing beside him was expressionlessly holding onto a large suitcase with both hands.

"Huick?"
"Ohh, so you did remember my name. Listen up, nii-chan, names are mportant. The trick to moving up in society is to remember your business contact's face and name. Well, it's not a something Guards would be used to.
"Sodid you have some business with me? I thought we were departing comorrow."
"To learn by watching."
The man dispatched from the Governmental Sector pointed with his chin at the training grounds he'd just come from with Monica.
"Just relaxing at the hotel is nice too but since I'm here at Tenketsu Palace Sophia>, so looking around and broadening my knowledge is what makes me an adult. And when I walked a little bit, I found an interesting place. Those are

The wire mesh fence-isolated outdoor training grounds.

your training grounds or something, right?"



"Ah, are you possibly asking us to guide you?"

"No, no, I wouldn't do something like have you take the trouble to do that. Rather than watching to learn, I'm the type to go hands-on. Kuro and I were thinking we should take the chance and participate."

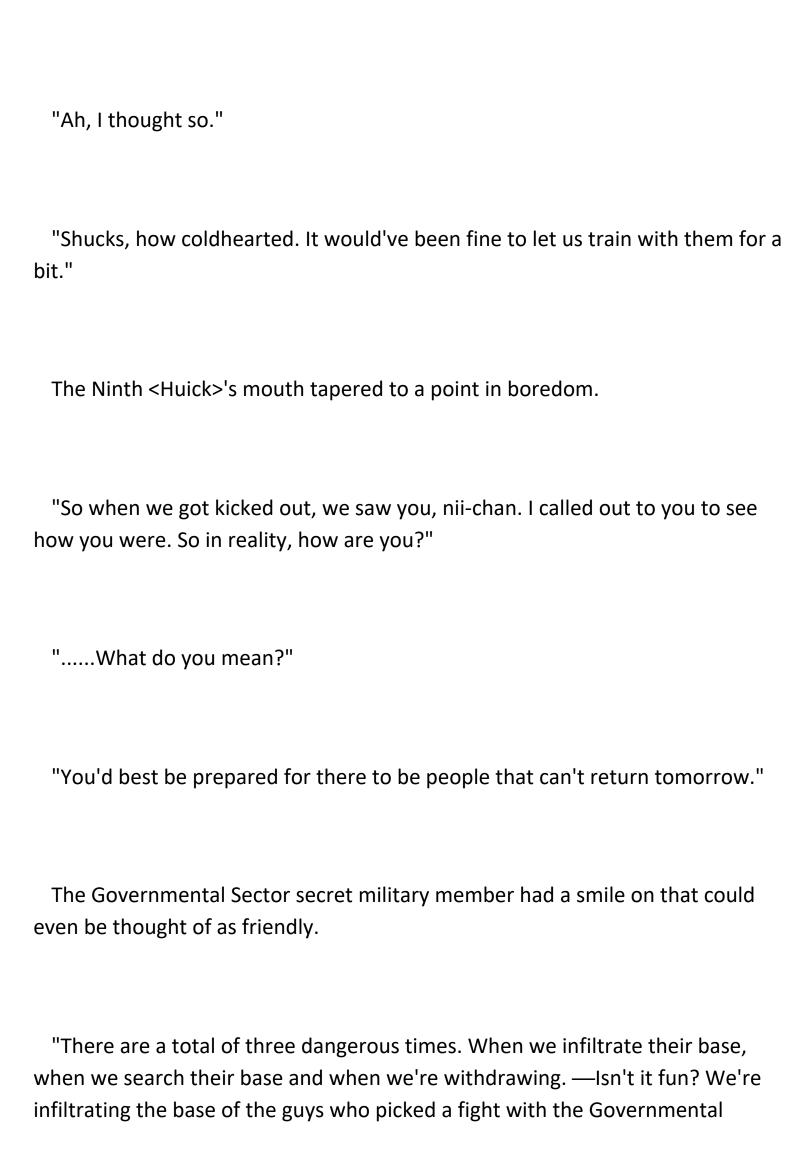
"In the training? No, but that would be....."

The weapons being used had experimental techniques of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> incorporated so it should be rare for an outsider to be allowed to enter the training grounds. At most, they would have to watch from outside the wire mesh fence.....

"Don't worry."

Kuro who had been keeping silent said with a rare wry smile.

"We were already found and chased out by somebody called Instructor."

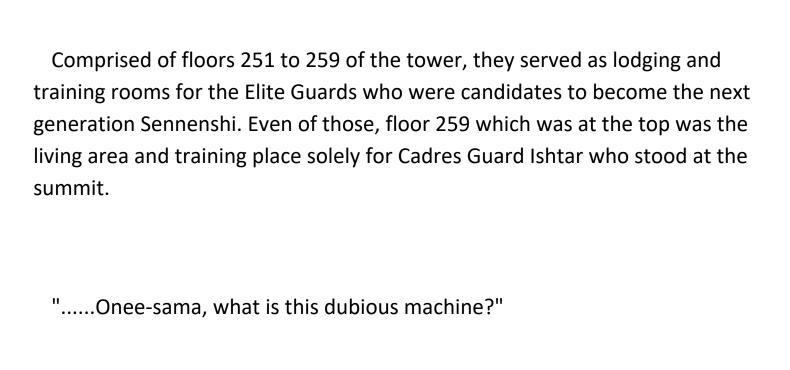




.....I see, so that's the reason. The main unit, separate unit and, on top of those, continuous observation by Priestesses for support. The reason such meticulous arrangements was because she was prepared for such sacrifices. "That's all I wanted to say. See you then; I'll be expecting things from you tomorrow, okay?" "Excuse us." The Ninth <Huick> waved his hand casually and Kuro bowed her head deeply. Watching the two head off from behind, Sheltis unconsciously clenched his fists tightly to the point that they became sweaty.

Part 4

The Elite Guard residences.



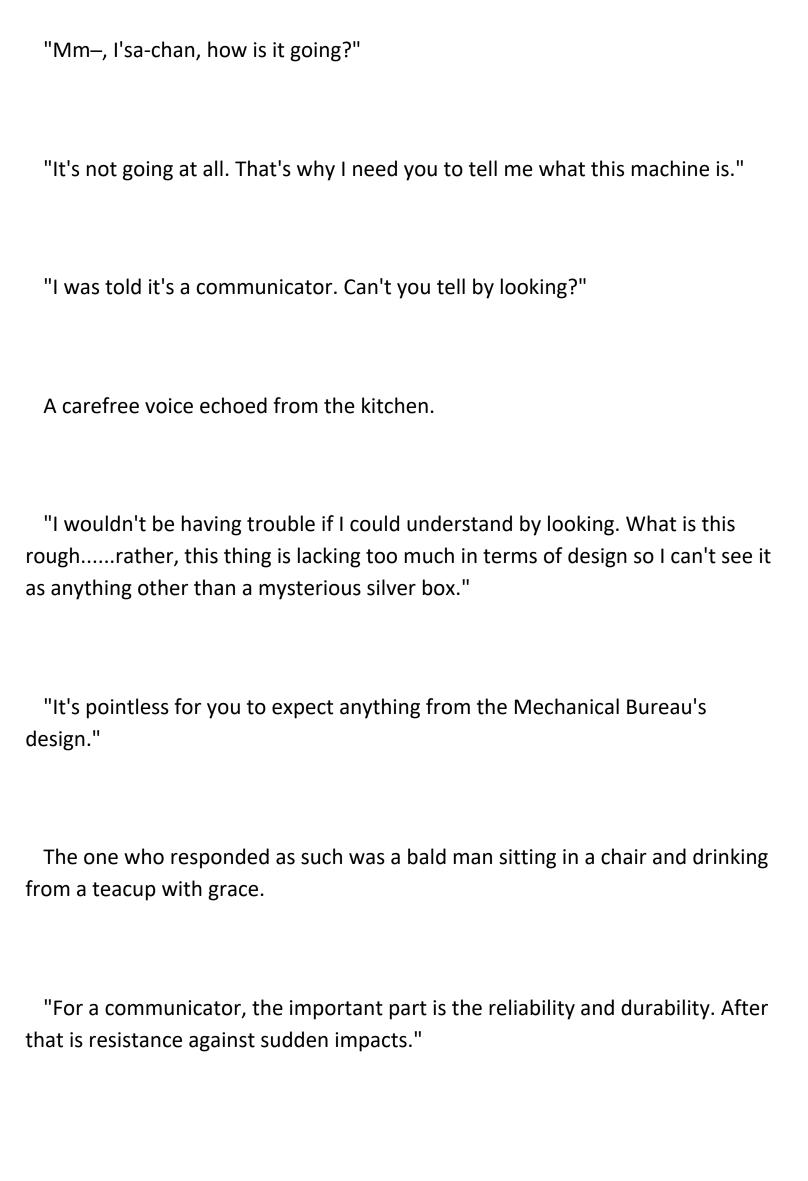
It was a silver cuboid which looked like it could fit her if she were to ball up. There were suspicious, flashing parts and some numbers were being converted into a graph on an LCD screen.

"We were told to investigate this, but I don't even know what this is."

She kicked the edge of the machine and sighed.

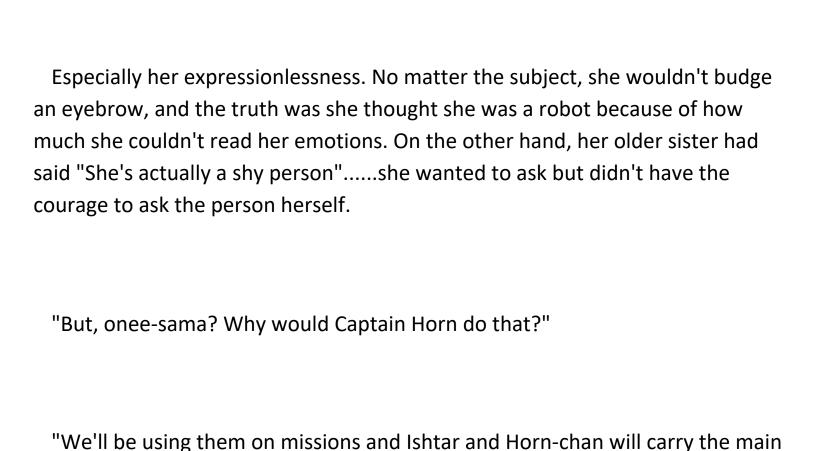
—Jeez, just when I thought she called me suddenly.

Sneaking a peak at her sister who was holed up in the kitchen, I'sa sighed.



".....Then you help too, Jin. If we don't get back to practice soon, we'll get chewed out by the boss." [T/N: "Boss" written as "Captain Ran".] Jin Ixnaris — the dual gunman paired with I'sa. While still in his early twenties, his calm bearing and bald appearance made him seem more mature than his years. "That's right—. Jin, you're a gunner so you're good with machines, right? The inspection has to be done quickly and returned to the owner or it's a nuisance." "I don't mind but who entrusted you with this?" "It was Horn-chan-" "Geh." I'sa's face tensed when Ishtar said that name nonchalantly. The third Sennenshi, Horn Nova. She was the Ex Machina versed in all manners of heavy firearms and the captain in charge of the third Guard unit.

"I might.....be bad at dealing with her."



communicator and an additional set respectively. That's why Ishtar was also

".....It seems like you'd be shot down for skimping on the inspection."

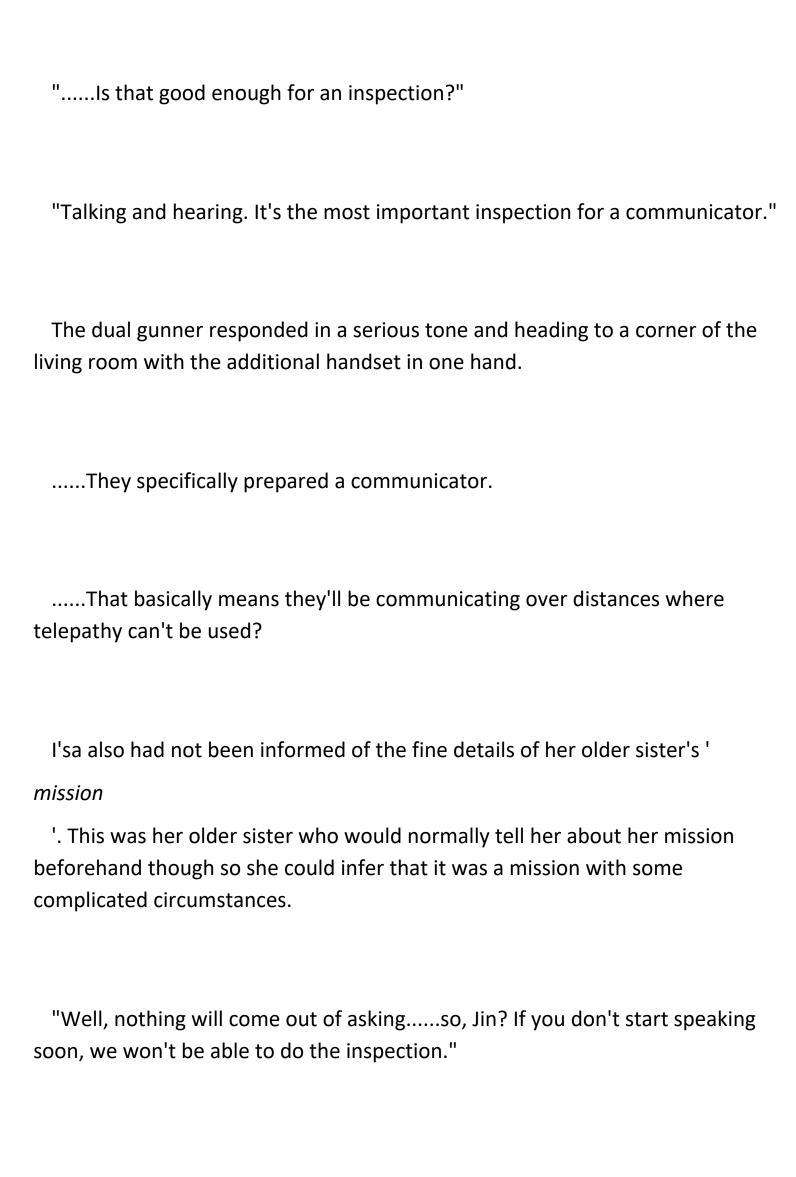
additional handset is this handheld terminal, right?"

"Let's get this done quick. The main communicator is this giant box and the

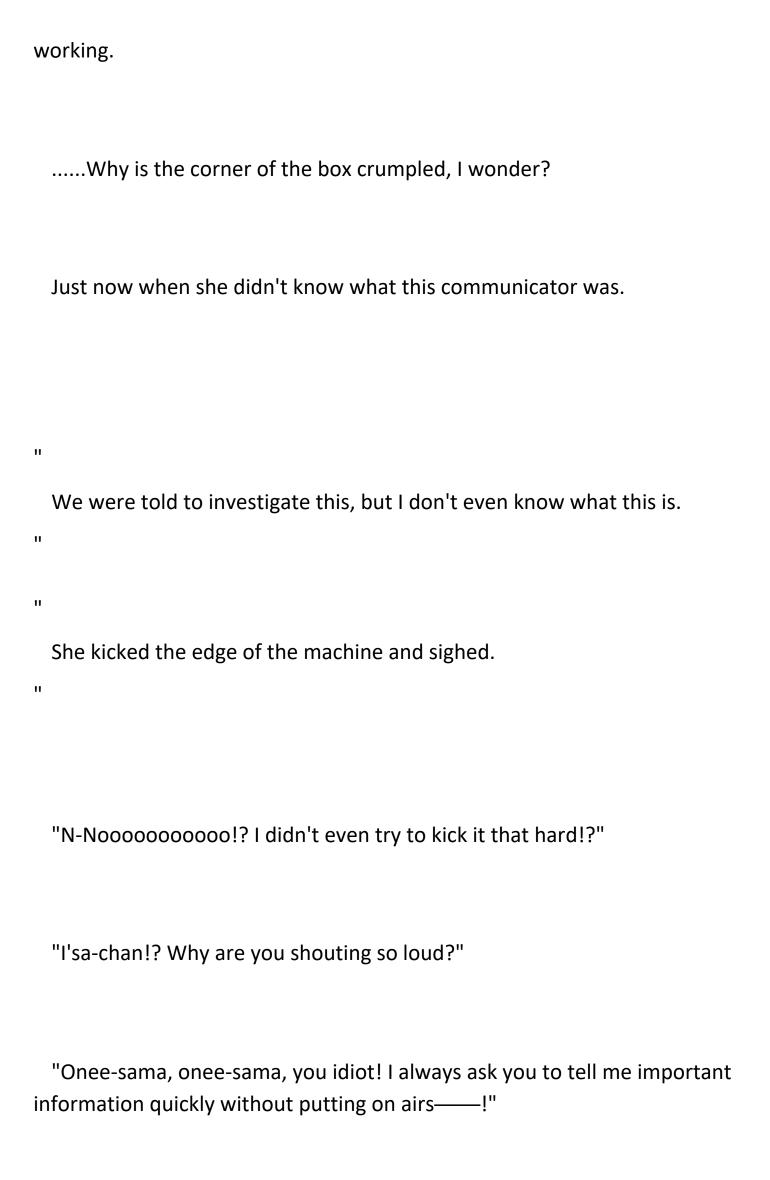
Taking out the terminal with skilled movements, Jin tossed one of them over.

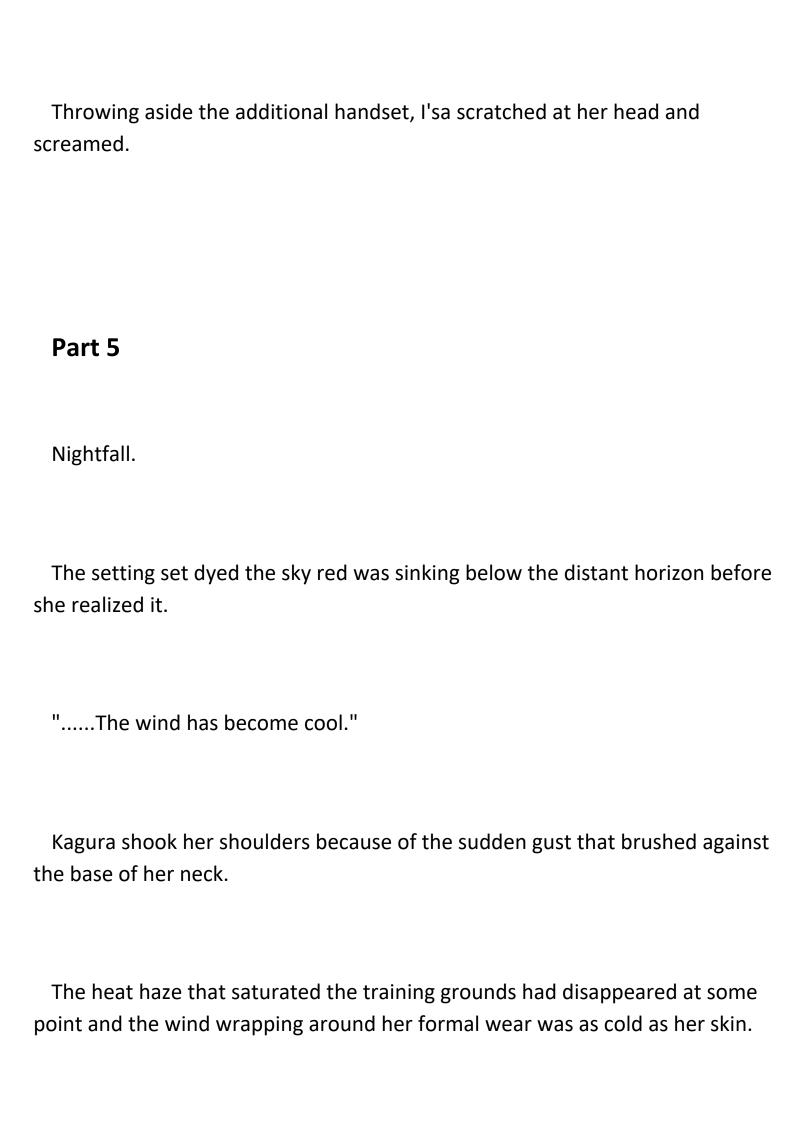
"I'll speak from one of the edges of the floor, so confirm if you can hear me."

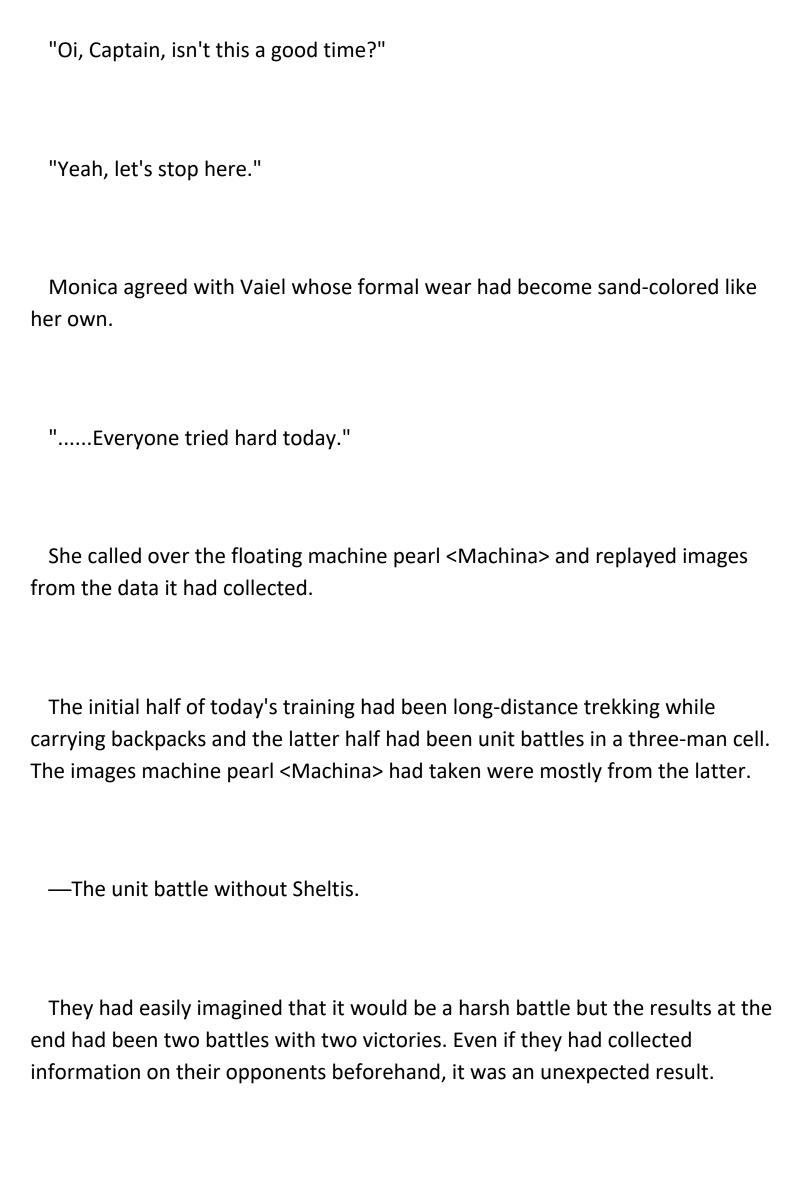
asked to inspect it."

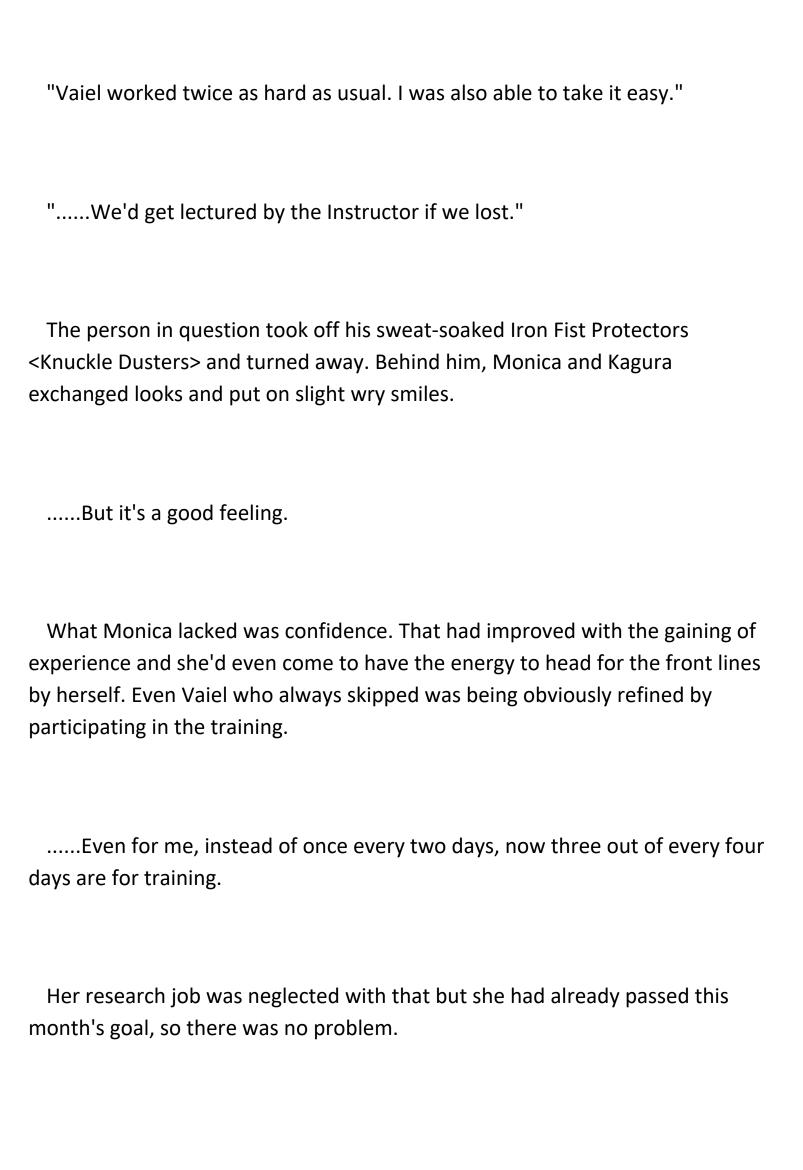


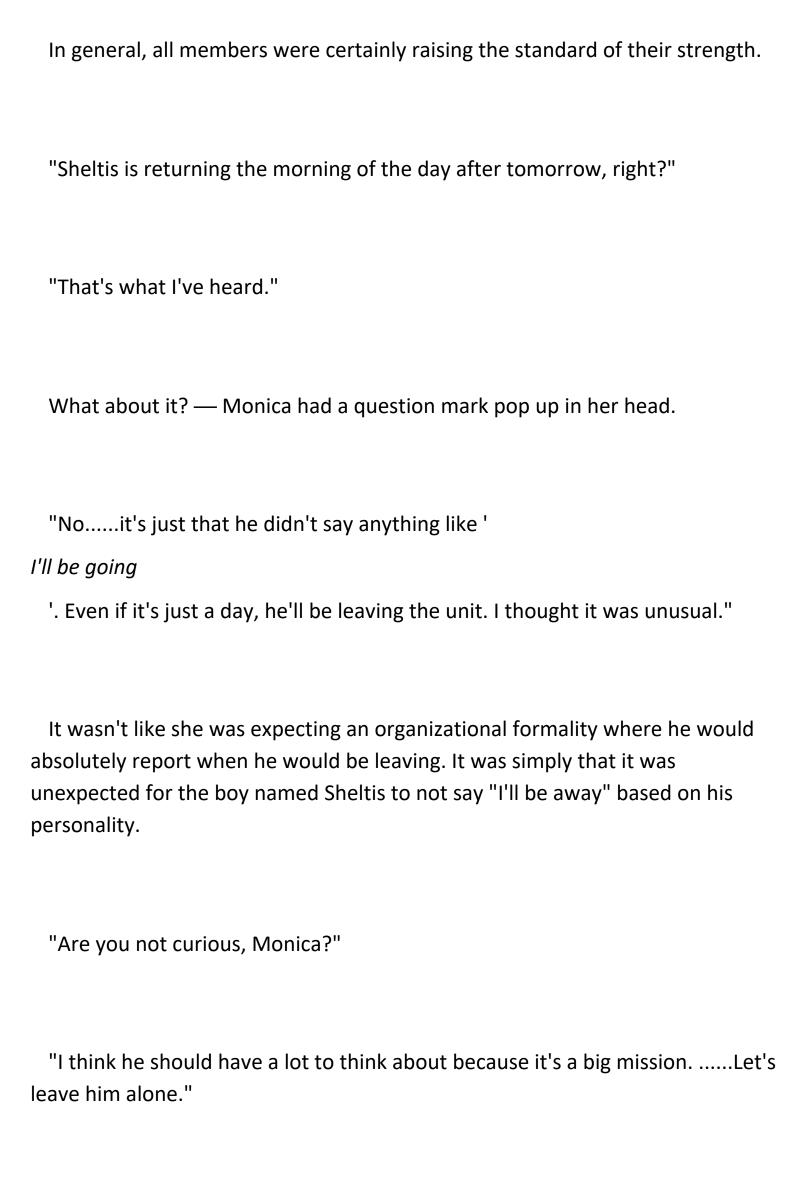




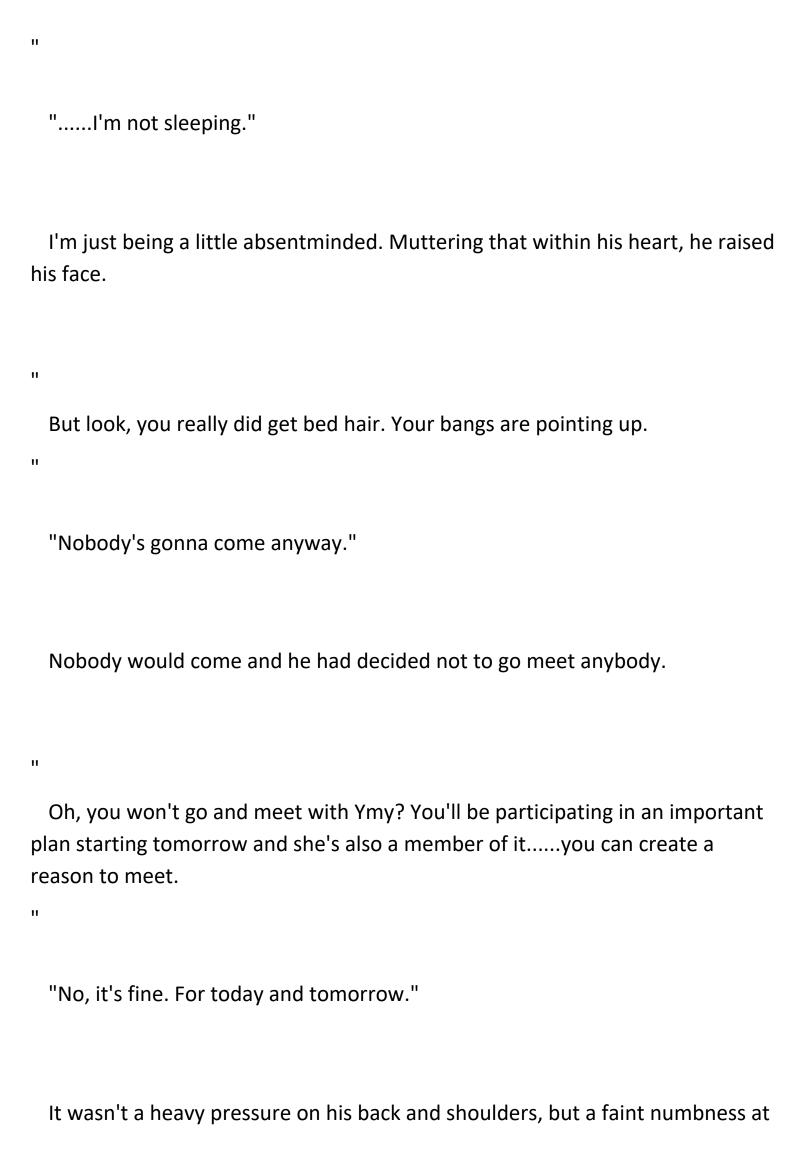




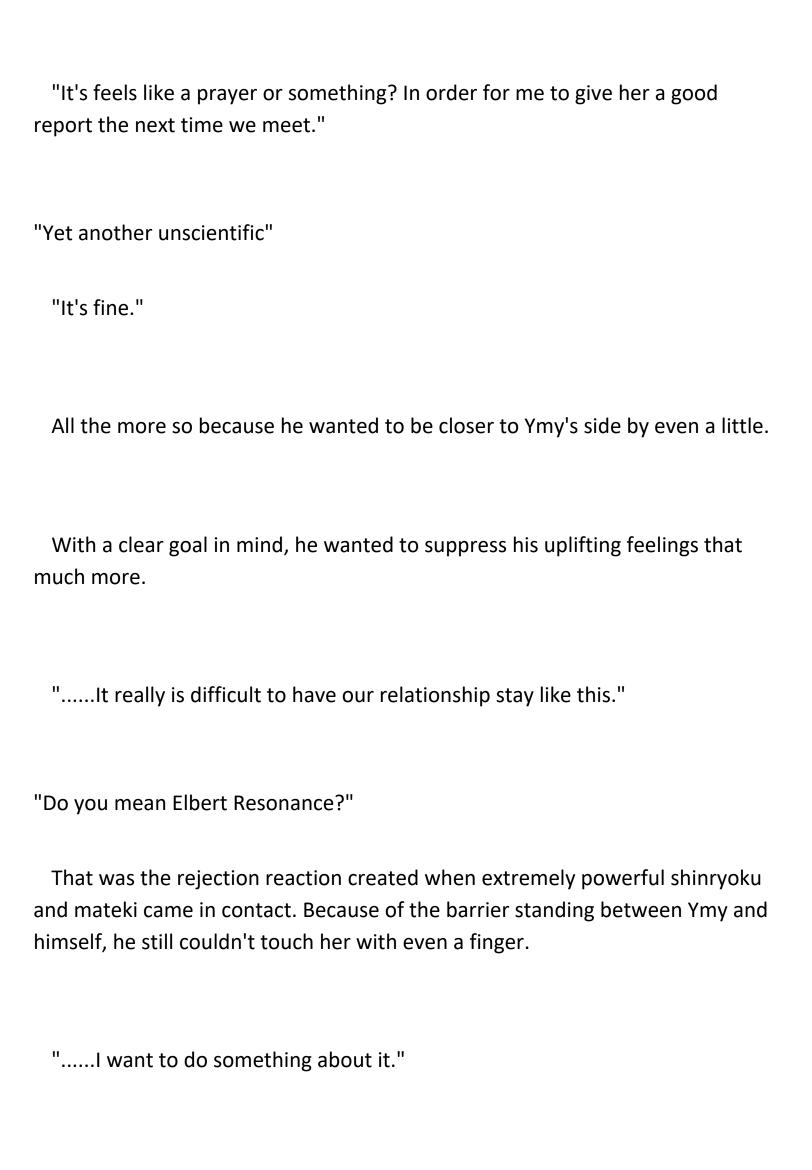




She placed both parts of her crossed rods <rosario> into her belt holders.</rosario>
With her vibrant sakura-colored hair waving in the wind, Monica looked up at the sky.
"We can only wait for his return."
Part 6
How long have I been like this?
A silent room.
Atop his desk, he had head laid atop his arms which were lying on the desk.
Chaltie if you sloop like that your hadband will be barrible
Sheltis, if you sleep like that, your bedhead will be horrible.



the tips of his fingers and toes.
—The quality of nervousness is different from before.
He would infiltrate one of the third organization's bases and might be able to meet Igun-I again. Moreover, there was whether would be able to hear a method which would remove the mateki nesting within him.
Then there was whether he would make it back to the floating continent <orbie clar=""> safely.</orbie>
"It looks like I'm uncharacteristically nervous. That's why I don't want to meet her."
11
Because it might be conveyed to Ymy if you meet her now?
"Maybe."
It wasn't like he didn't want to see her. He just had a feeling that he mustn't meet her.



He was holding down his voice.
—I want to tell her sorry for keeping you waiting. I want to be told welcome back.
He was keeping Ymy waiting at the very top of the tower.
He had always had her worrying. For over a year, she didn't have a Sennenshi and that should have made her uneasy.
"At leastI would like to report something happy."
Just a little more. Just how much would those words put Ymy at ease? I want to alleviate Ymy's worries. This is a prayer for that.
п
Then you should sleep soon. Since you've already decided you won't meet with her.
II
"I can't sleep."

Replying like that in response to machine crystal <ilis>' tone which seemed to have yielded, Sheltis turned back to and plopped down onto the desk.</ilis>
Part 7
"Sheltis, Sheltis, wake up. It's already six."
I don't remember sleeping.
When Sheltis woke up, there was one hour left to departure.
"How are you feeling?"
"Hm, I don't think there's any problem. It feels like my shoulders and thighs are a little stiff though."
п
Jeez—. That's why I told you to quit it with that weird posture and go to sleep.
"It'll fix itself while I walk."

Leaving machine crystal <Ilis> atop the bed, he took deep breaths while walking to the washroom. While staring at the splashes of cold water gushing out of the faucet—

".....Let's go."

He whispered that for himself to hear.

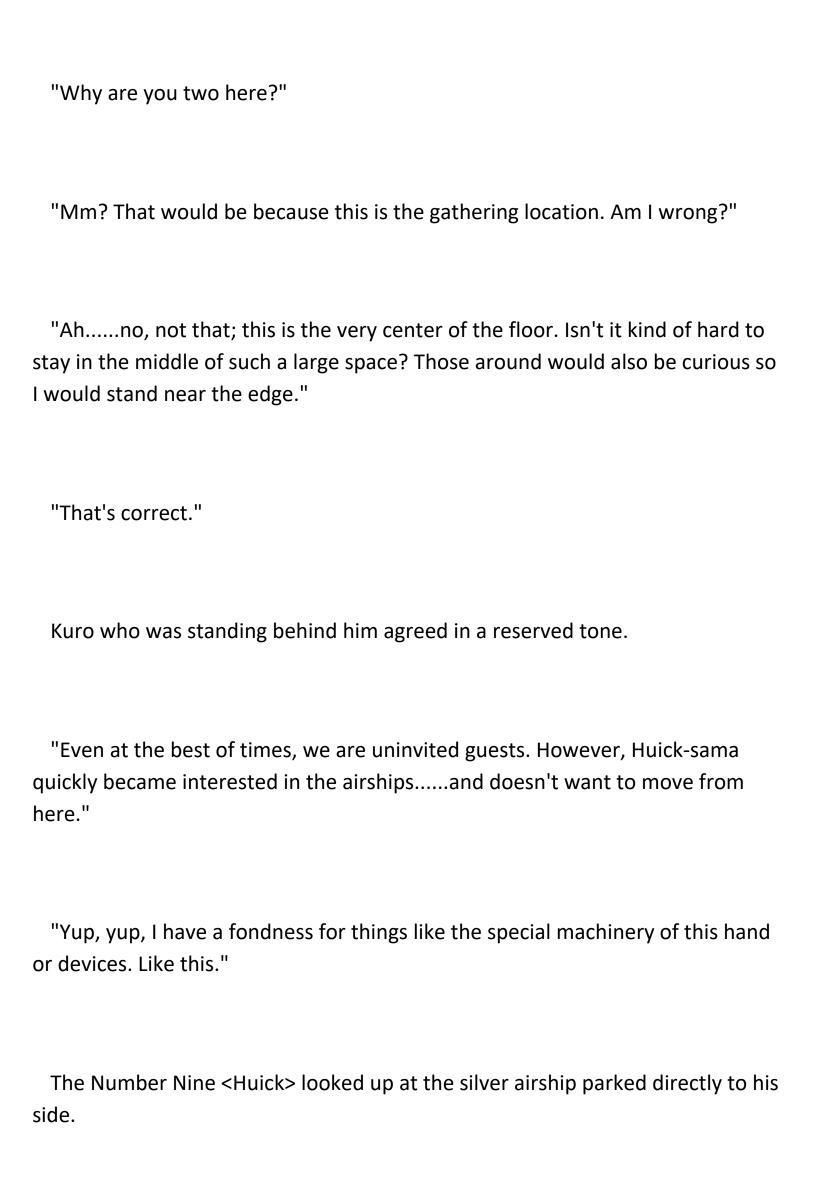
Part 8

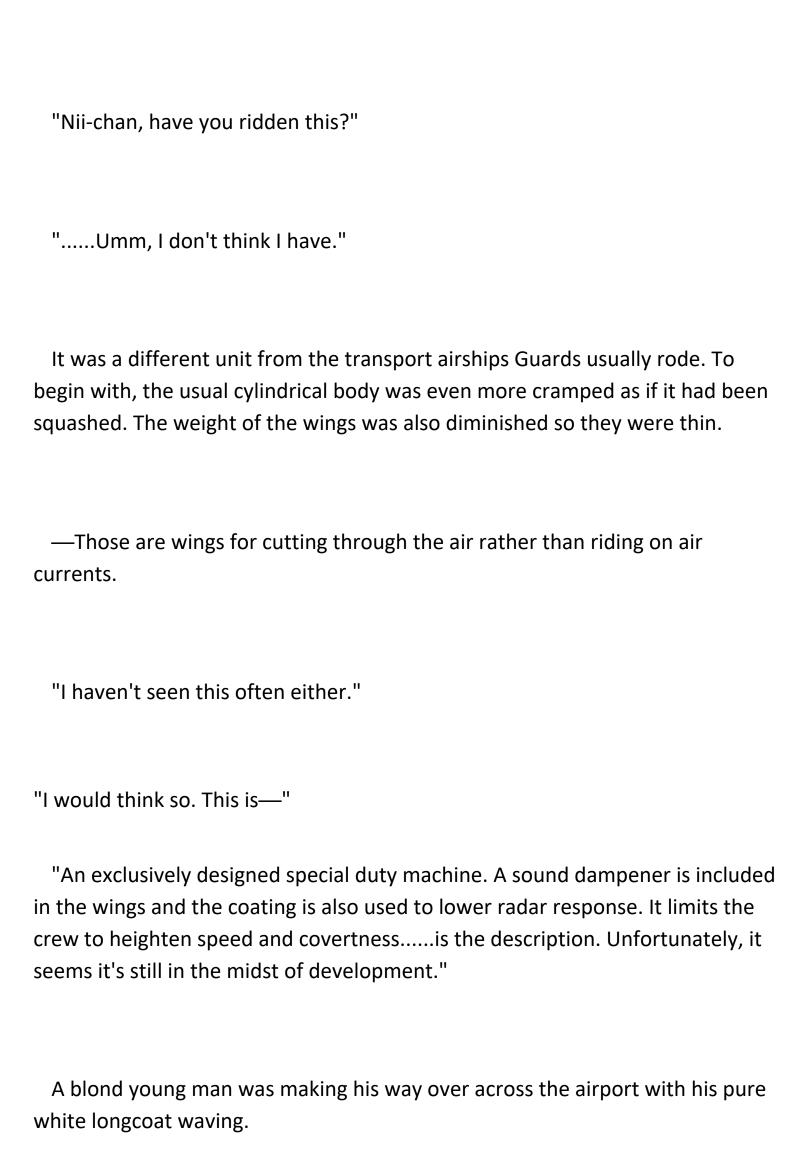
Tenketsu Palace < Sophia >, floor 65.

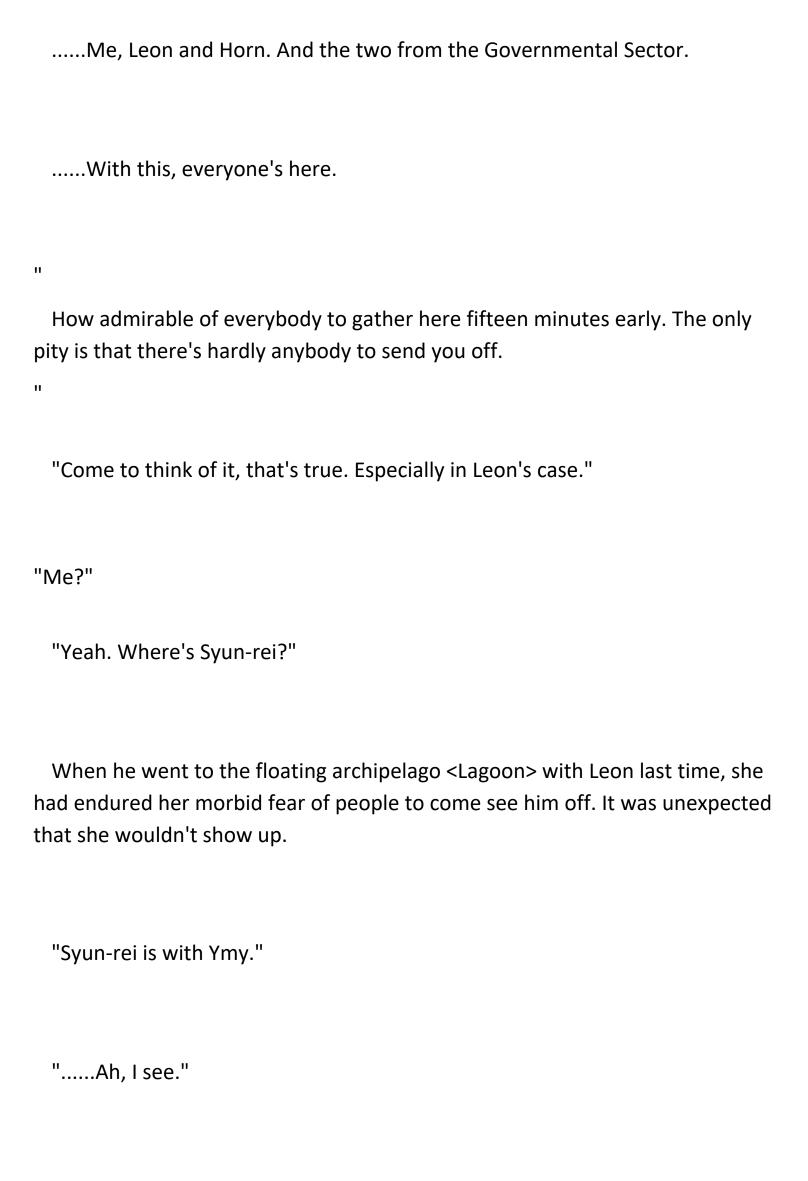
The running engine was making thunderous noise along with the propeller which was spinning at super speeds.

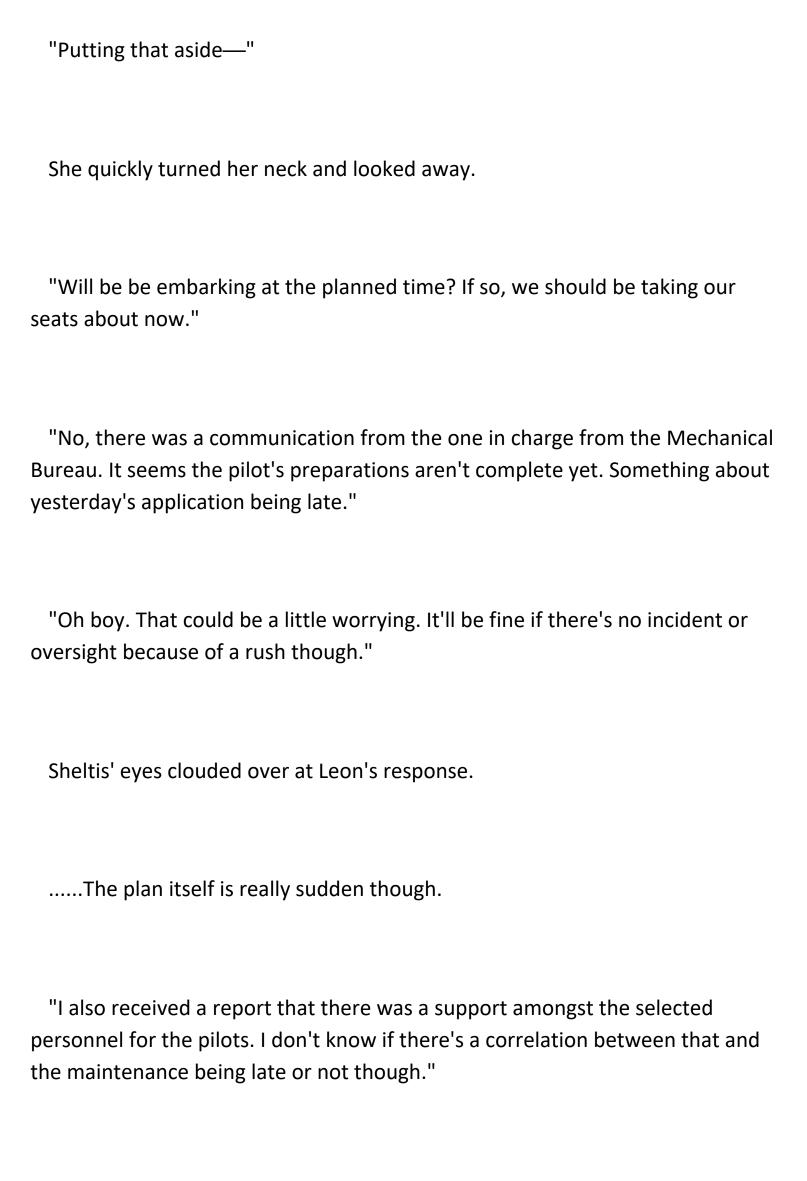
There were one, two extremely heavy airships advancing while warping the shock-absorbant tiles under the floor. Behind them was a technician maintaining the shock-absorbant tiles.

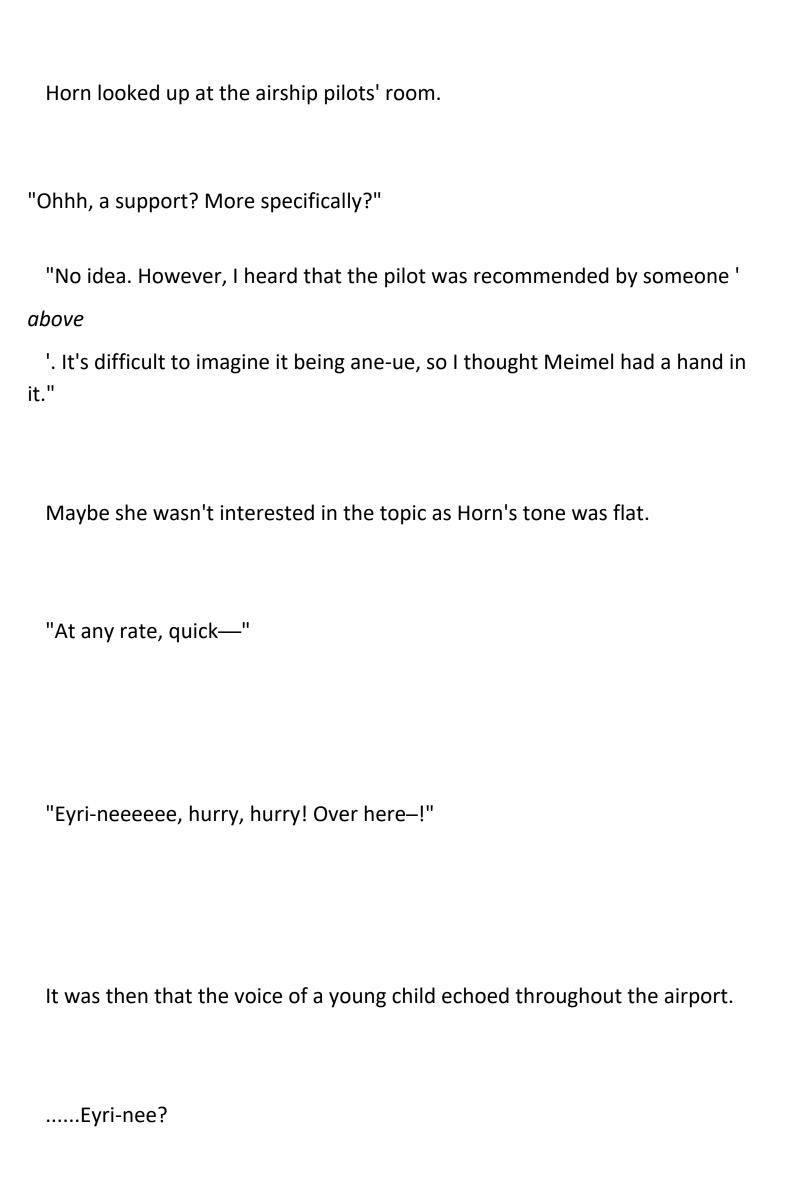
11 It sure is lively straight from the early morning, isn't ittt. 11 Machine crystal < llis > spoke in a voice that seemed to feel admiration. The tower's internal airport — it was a floor supervised by the Mechanical Bureau and an area which was conspicuous even for the tower. Those moving around there were not clerks but mechanical technicians and they wore faded overalls instead of the suits worn by clerks. "Oh, nii-chan, ain't you early. I admire you for coming here thirty minutes before we're supposed to meet up." "No. I'm afraid he spent the entire night without sleeping." Directly behind the Number Nine <Huick> who was folding his arms and carrying nothing was his female subordinate in a suit. The two executives of the Governmental Sector were boldly standing right at the center of the floor.The remaining ones are Leon and Horn but it looks like they haven't come yet.







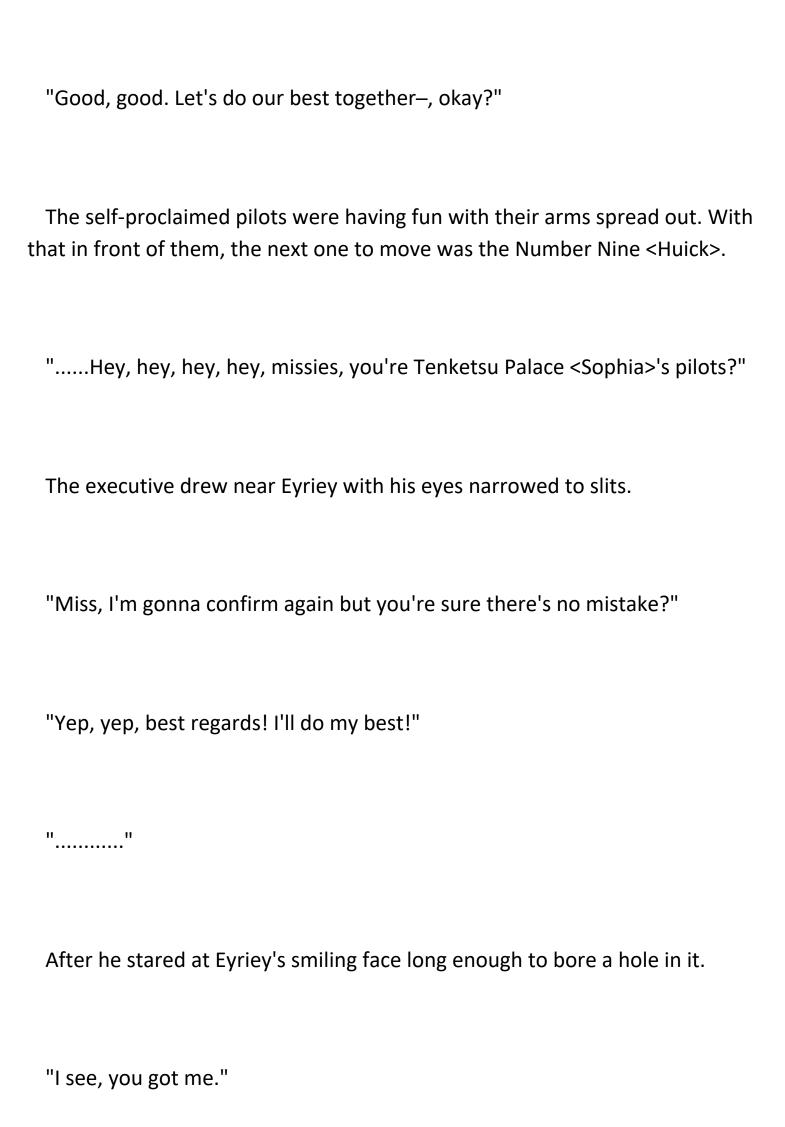


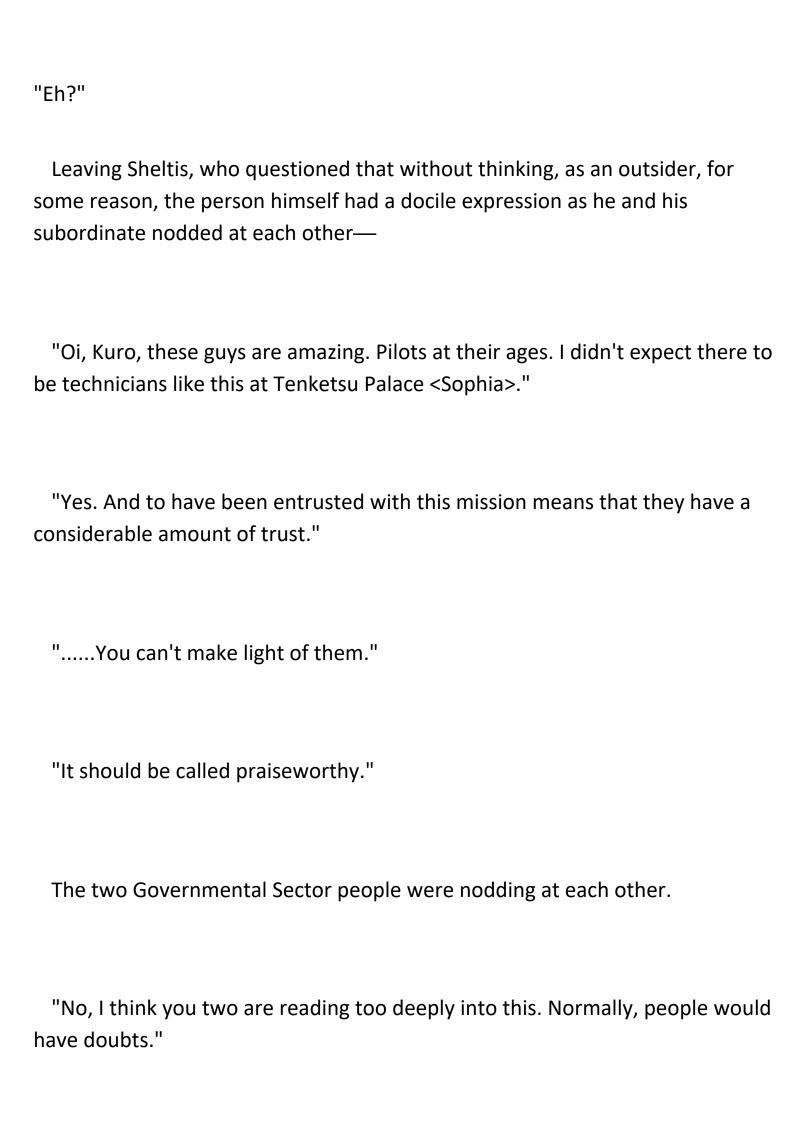


And that voice just now.
"Huh, Ihave a really bad feeling. That's strange, this should be a really mportant mission. The pilot coming should be a really skilled veteran as well."
"Mm? Skilled? Did you call for me?"
A figure drew closer while pushing a metal wheelbarrow.
The girl's large, cheerful-looking eyes and vibrant orange hair emphasized her liveliness.
She was wearing a plain short with machine oil-stained work overalls on top and had no glamour or make-up, but that actually suited this girl.
"Hey there—, Sheltis, morning. It's the arrival of an exemplary pilot."
She waved her hand casually in greeting.

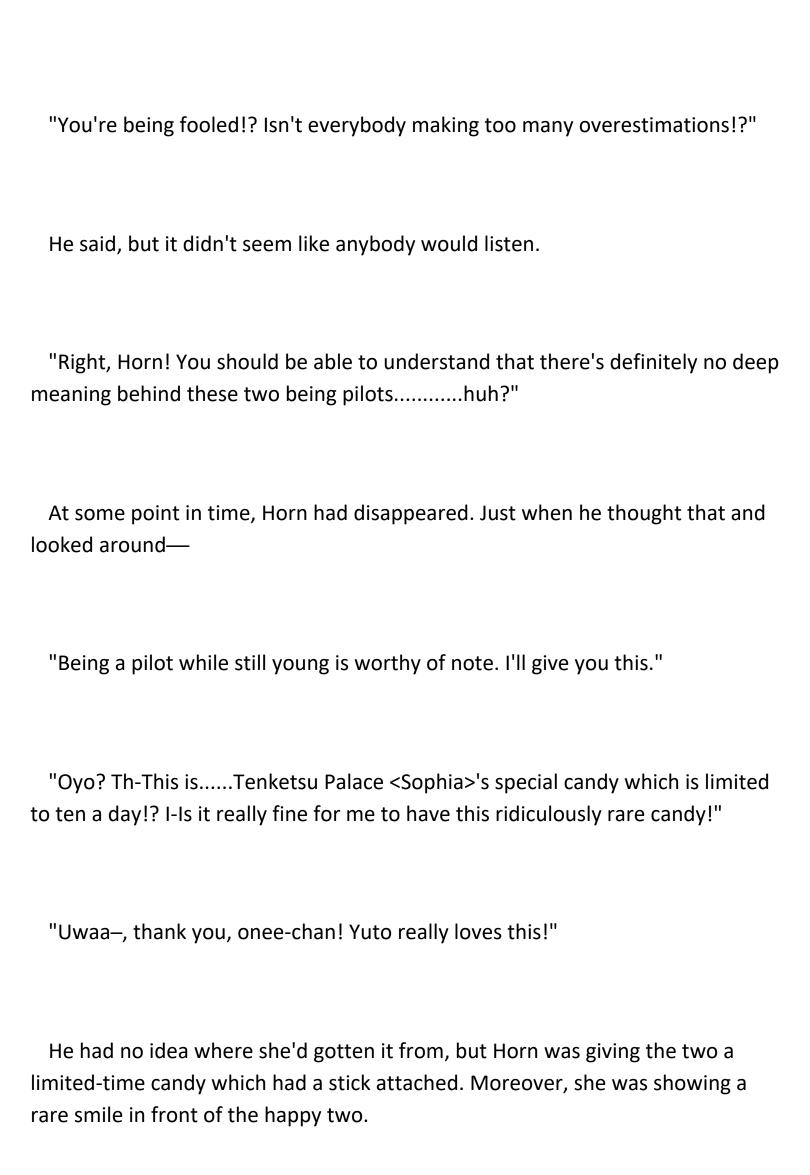
"Pilot."
"Mm, what're you suddenly holding your head for?"
"Uaaaaaaaa, as I thouuuuuught!? Why am I only right at times when I have a bad feeling? I'm worried before we even take off!?"
In front of Eyriey, Sheltis screamed out with all his heart.
"Ah, how rude, it's the best treatment for me to be the pilot."
"I kinda have this feeling that we crashed the last time you piloted an airship though!?"
"Muu–. That was an accident. I'll stop at emergency landing this time."
"An emergency landing is enough of an accident, isn't it!?"
I don't have the will to retort anymore.

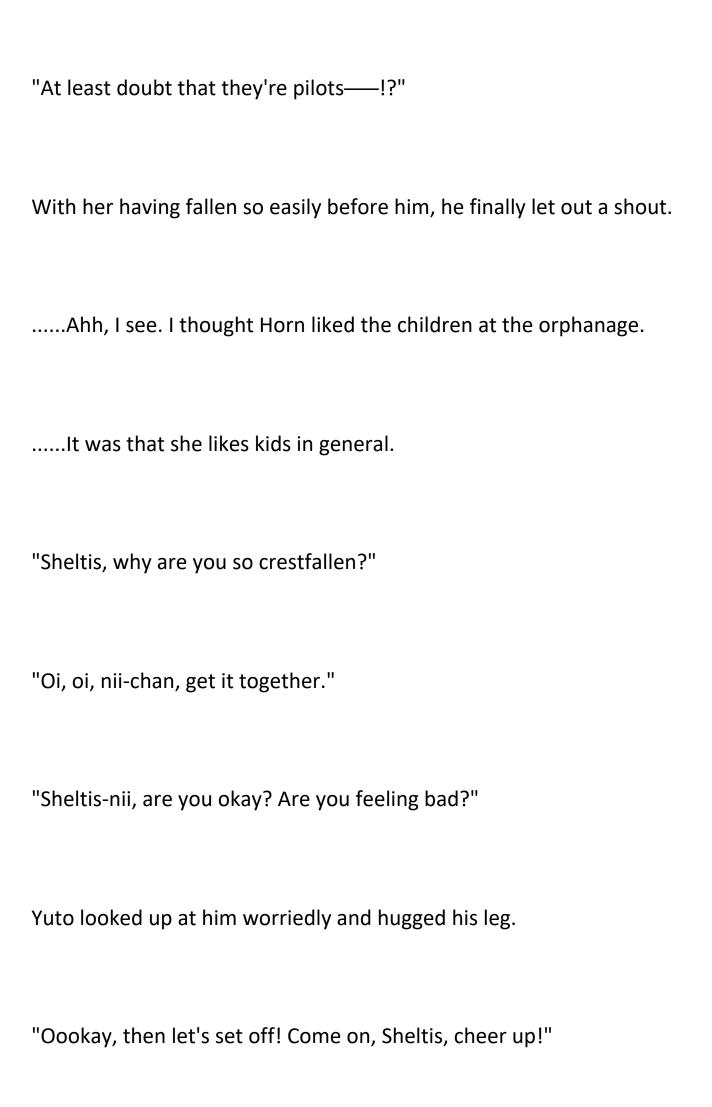




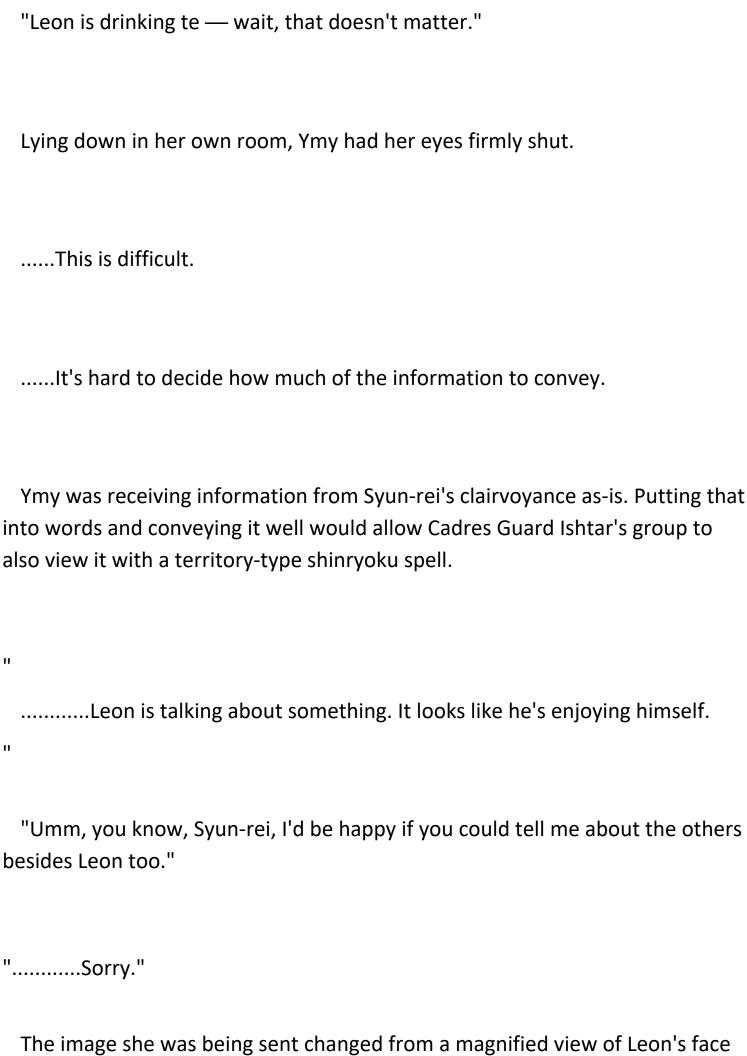


.....It's Eyriey and Yuto after all. He had worked together with them at The Two Swans < Albireo > for two years. At the least, he had confidence that the reason for their selection wasn't as deep as the two from the Governmental Sector believed. But. "What are you saying, Sheltis, you don't understand the meaning of this order?" After the two from the Governmental Sector came Leon with a bold smile. "What?" "Look at how those Governmental Sector two are surprised. It was probably Meimel who gave the order to dumbfound our rival organization." 11 That's right, that's right, I'll also be at ease if Eyriey comes along with us. п On top of that, even machine crystal < llis> was blinking in satisfaction.





"No, see, Iwas sure that somebody would oppose you guysbut wellif the others say it's fineit can't be helped anymore."
Sheltis also trudged after the line heading towards the airship boarding stairs.
Part 9
Tenketsu Palace <sophia>, floor 287.</sophia>
"The airship has taken off."
11
—It is now safely away from the tower. The passengers are the four of the main unit and one for the separate unit to make a total of five, as planned. There are two pilots.
II
Looking over the scene sent to her by Syun-rei, she was sending information via telepathy to several recipients at the same time.
"Leon's drinking tea."



The image she was being sent changed from a magnified view of Leon's face to bird's eye view which included Sheltis and the others who were in the

surroundings.
Though it can't be helped that this happened.
Pursuit with clairvoyance was, so to speak, like a scene shot with the spell caster's handheld camera. Who to set as the focal point and observe was entirely up to the caster. For example, in Syun-rei's case, she would focus on nothing but Leon and neglect the surroundings.
The last time we did this in practice, all that was shown was Leon's sleeping face for a whole evening.
Well, that's Syun-rei for you.
And.
п
Ah, look, it's urgent, Syun-rei. Leon just went to the changing room.
A telepathic message from Meimel echoed in her head.
"Y-Yeah. He went."

The next moment. What was sent to Ymy's brain was the image of her childhood friend making his way to the changing room.

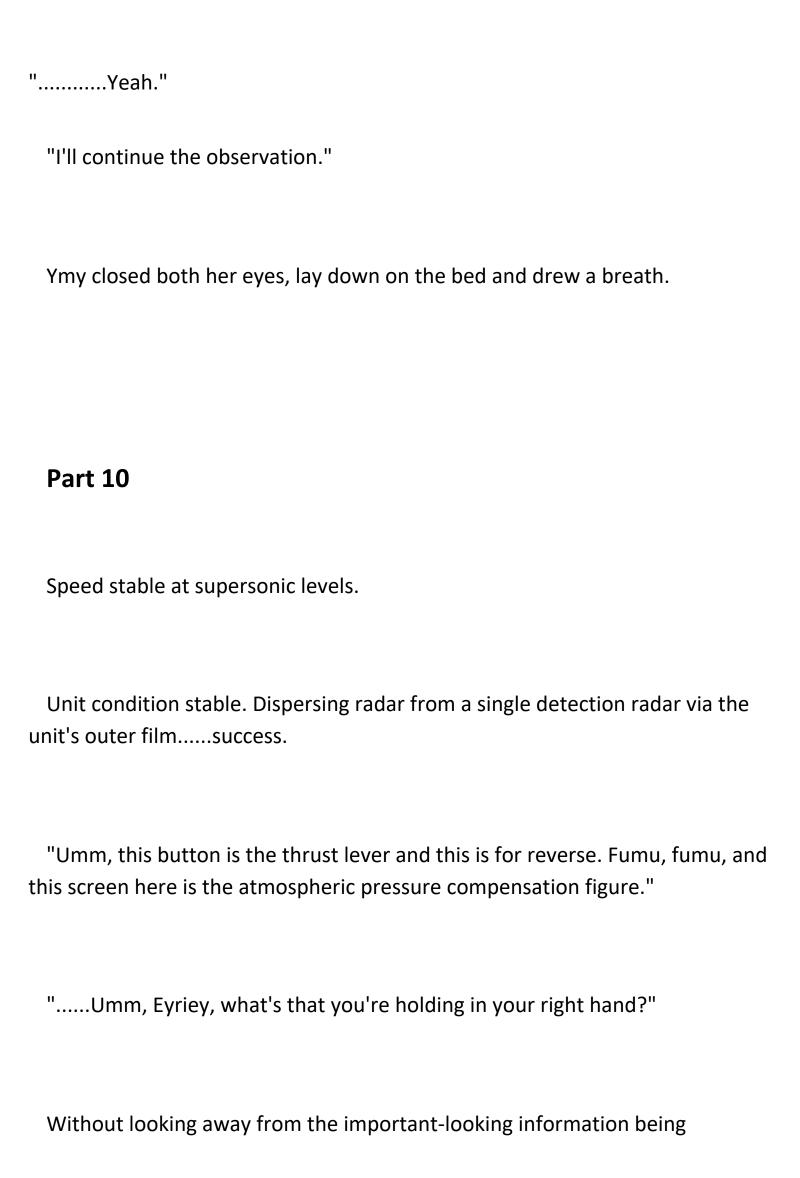
"ļ"
11
We could follow him with clairvoyance.
"Y-Y-Yo-You don't have to!? I, I-I-IIon't reallyhave any i-interest in Sheltis getting changed!?"
After all, I watched Sheltis change long ago and that had been a givenW-Well, that was around ten years ago.
Nothat's
It can't be helped if I look for the sake of the missionI think. N-No, no, wait, hold up, me! As I thought, that's really not good!
Sheltis came out. He just removed his jacket.
"He sets off false alarms."



There was no problem with Eyriey who was sitting in the center. Of course, it had been surprising that she was selected as the pilot but that was probably the work of Meimel.
The problem was to her side—
The area of the co-pilot's seat was wavering like a heat haze. But there was no way there was a heat haze in the airship. If so
"Hey, about that co-pilot's seat"
"Jamming. A separate shinryoku spell caster is acting. "
Jamming, as I thought. The entirety of Tenketsu Palace <sophia> was covered in a weak barrier which prevented distant clairvoyance. But she remembered having broken through a similar barrier at the Governmental Sector's conference grounds with force.</sophia>
But this is different.

	It's a barrier strong enough to challenge Syun-rei?
11	It's an extremely polished spell. I wouldn't have noticed if I were lax.
	"That much?"
tŀ	It was not that Syun-rei was having a hard time; it was because it was Syun-rei nat she realized her sense of discomfort.
	If so, then if it had been her doing the clairvoyance, she might not even have ad a sense of discomfort to the point of showing a heat haze. The co-pilot seat rould be '
si	mply empty ' and she might not even know there was a barrier there.
	To be able to do that, the individual would need to be a practitioner of the ame Priestess-level. But why the co-pilot seat? Was there somebody who idn't want their existence known sitting there?
	"I'll try asking Meimel later. I think it was probably Meimel who

recommended Eyriey so she should also know who the co-pilot is."





"If the control stick were really attached to the unit, then Yuto's actions in the co-pilot seat would actually have an effect on the unit. If I remove it, that won't happen. It won't be found out if I just reattach it later."

I see, you have unparalleled development ability as always.

".....I'm worried."

п

1

However, the airship was actually flying in reality and there were no errors on displayed on the instrumentation so he was surprised.

"Eyriey, what's this '

' reaction on the detection radar over here?"

"Isn't that just the Governmental Sector's?"

Moving the stack of detailed design documents to her side, Eyriey removed the belt around her waist.

"Mmsitting too long stiffens your body. The Governmental Sector's radar
isn't some overblown thing. They predict the paths of airships flying around the
floating archipelago <lagoon> and inform the airships so they don't crash into each other."</lagoon>

I would think. Since Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> has a much more large-scale detection system.

1111

11

"Oh? What's up, Sheltis-kun?"

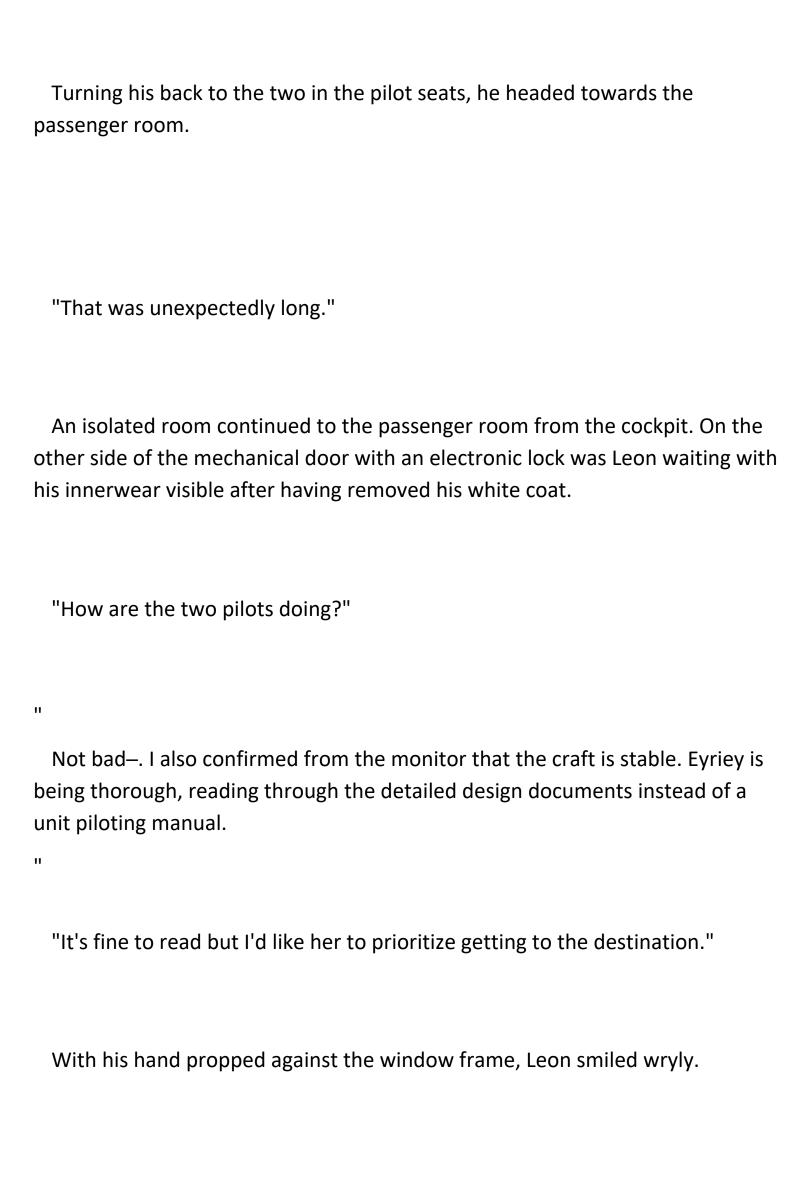
Eyriey stood up and started doing stretching exercises.

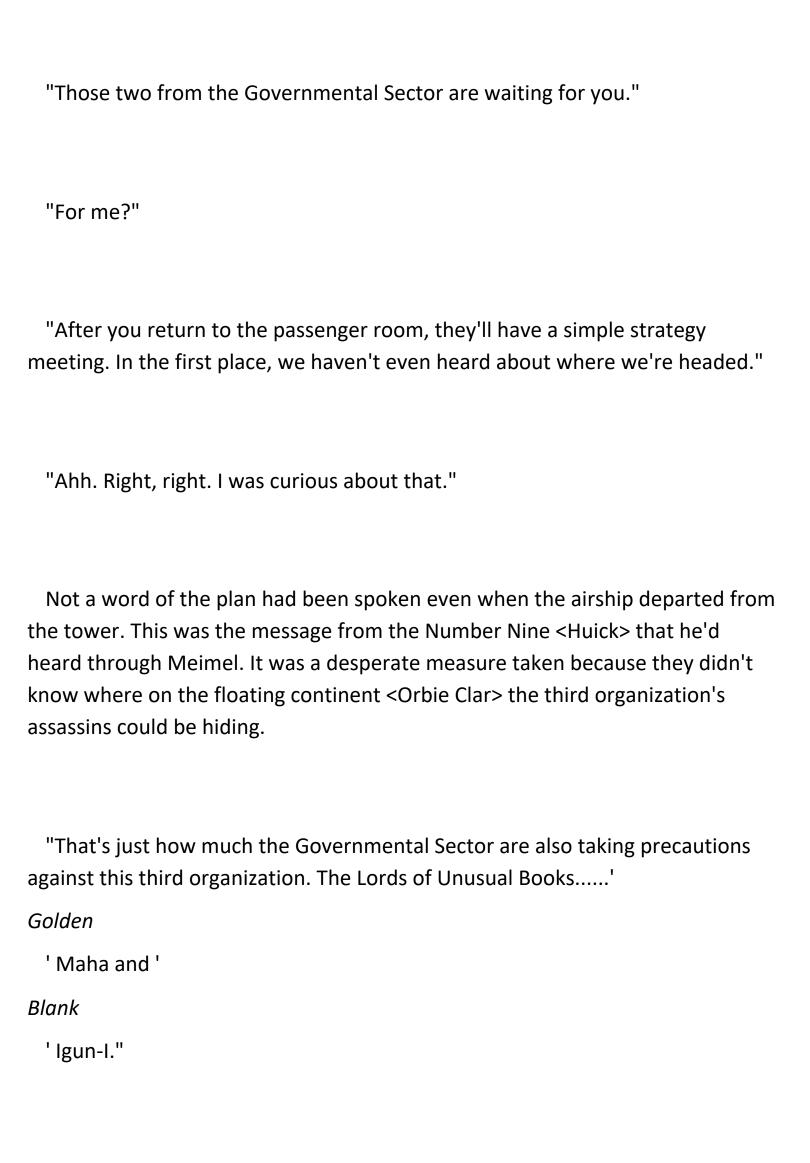
"Well, it's nothing major. I just simply thought, '

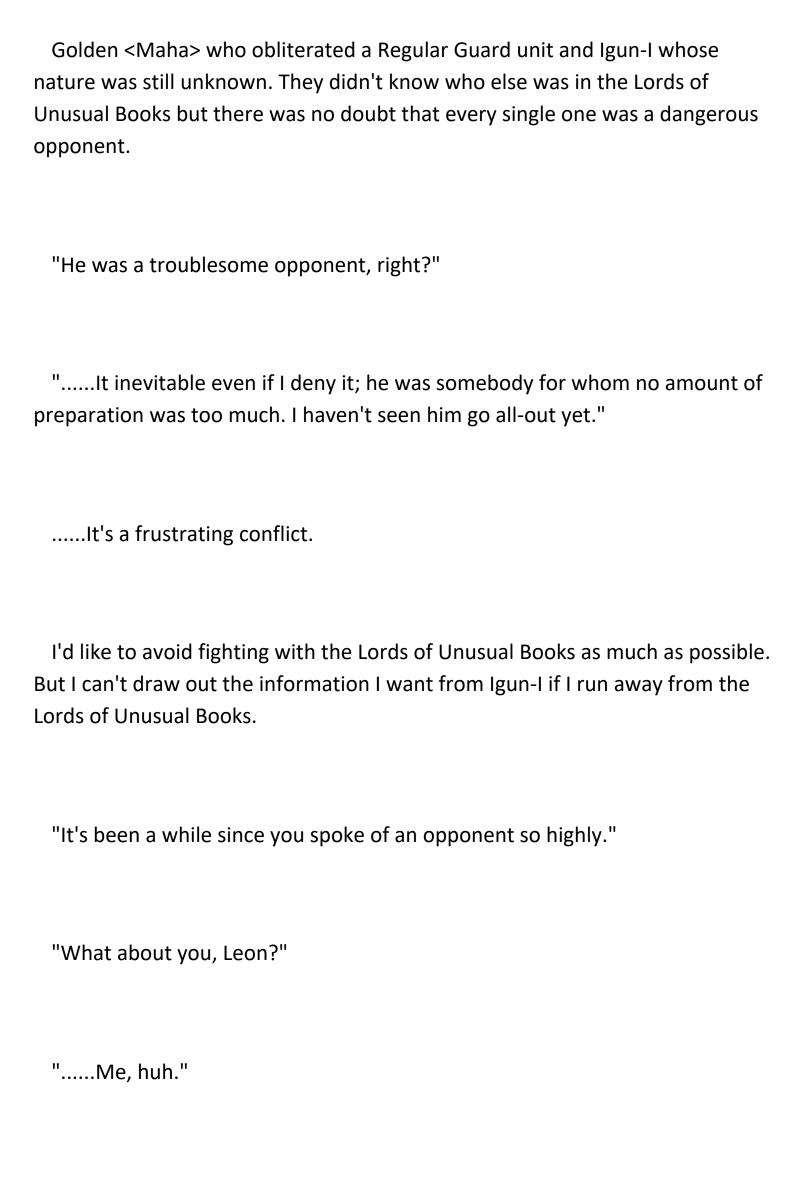
Ahh, so we're passing near the Governmental Sector right now'."

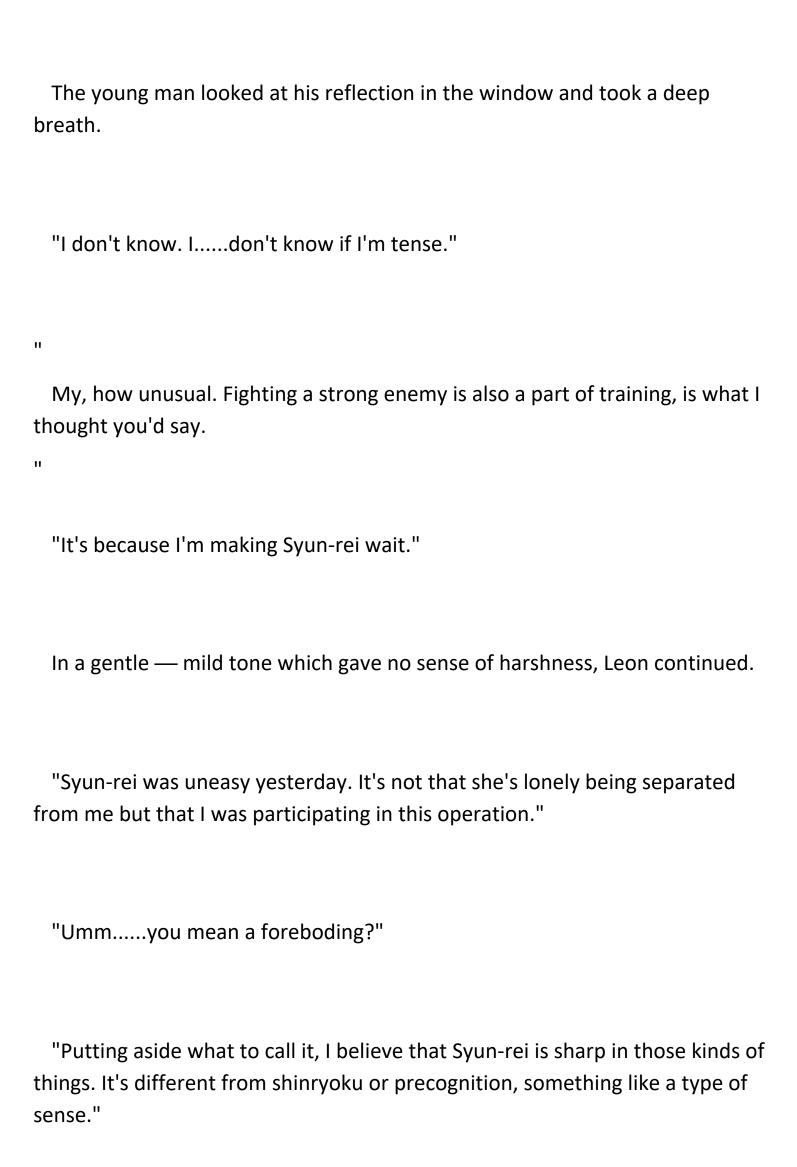
"Yup, yup. Rather, we'll be at our destination pretty soon. I received the path and location from the onii-san wearing a Governmental Sector hat so I just flew along that."

"Is that so."
Proper pilots had been brushed aside and Eyriey was selected as the pilot. He had thought she had would have heard the summary of this time's mission.
"They wouldn't tell us either."
That was true of the location of the third organization's base as well as how they were planning to infiltrate. No matter how covert their secret military organization was, it was difficult to think they would burst in just like this.
"I was sure they would tell us soon too."
It had been several hours. If the Number Nine <huick> had spoken to him, it was about silly small talk or questions about Tenketsu Palace <sophia>.</sophia></huick>
Beyond that, has he already spoken with the Sennenshi or Priestesses?
At any rate, I won't know if I don't ask.
"Eyriey, I'm counting on you for the piloting."



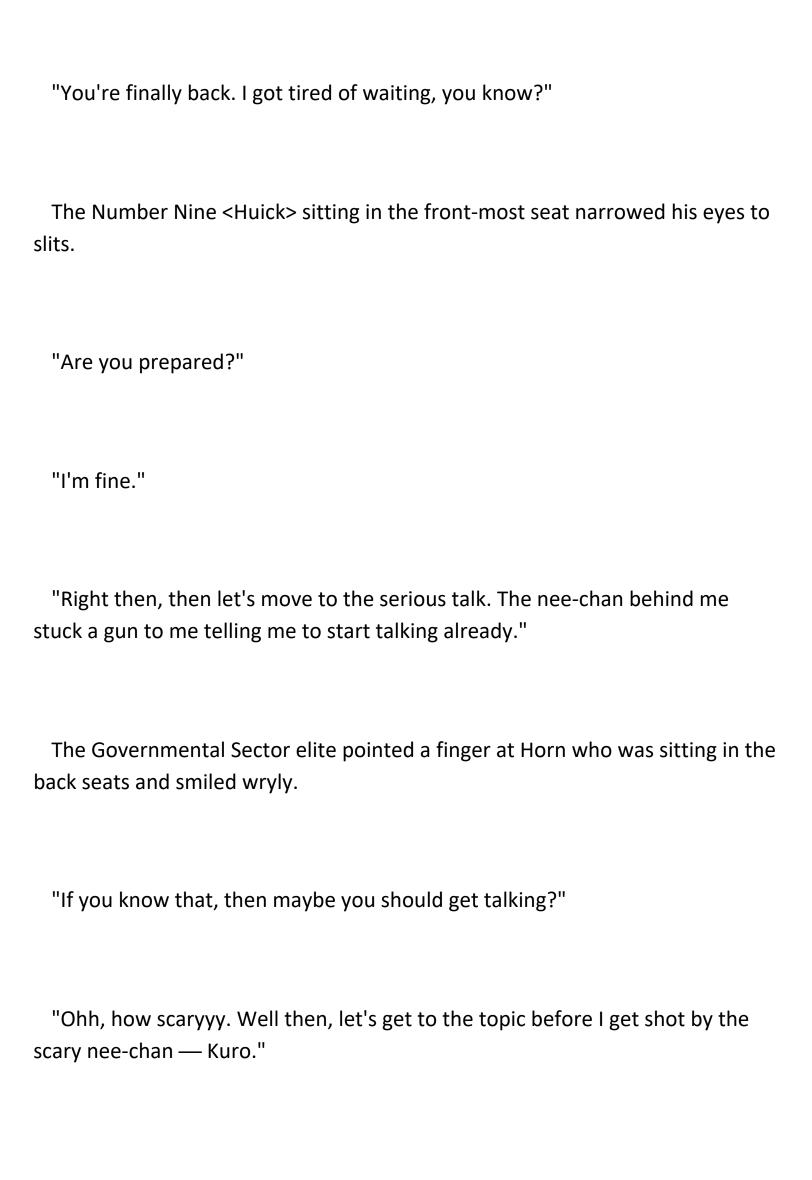


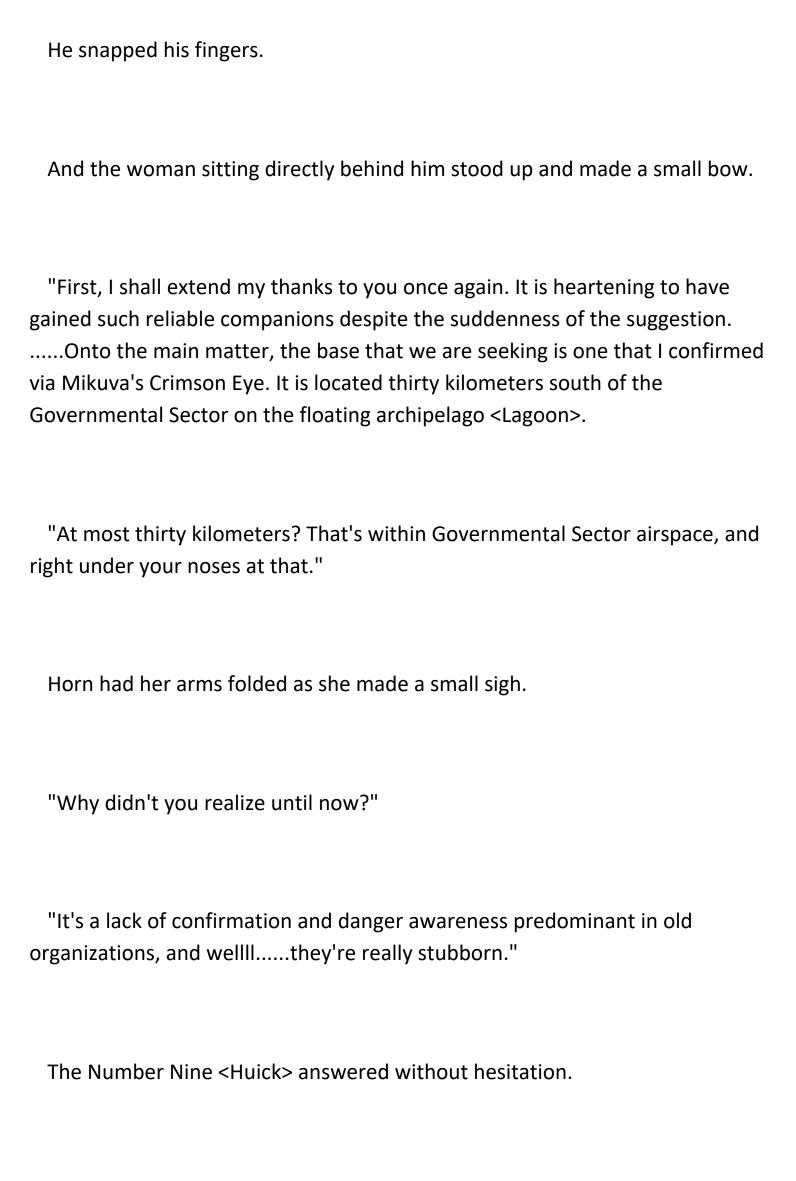




The young man's eyes which were gazing into the window were showing a color of stillness they would normally never show.
"I am still somebody in the midst of training. No matter the mission, I can't say something is absoluteThat's why I always go forth with all my strength. Even more so if Syun-rei is worried about me."
Leon is the same as me.
Because I couldn't go to meet Ymy yesterday.
That was to say that these were opponents which warranted that much tension and unease. Whether what lay ahead would become their deathbeds or a means of survival, all of it would depend on them.
"But you're not planning on keeping her worrying, right?"
"Of course not."
"I thought you'd say that."

His response was firm as always and that was what made this man reliable above all.
"And you, if you want to get promoted already, don't screw up. Don't think you can stay as a Cadet Guard and keep Ymy waiting forever."
"Roger that."
He raised his hand with his reply.
"—Well then."
"Let's go."
Sheltis and Leon each spoke and then walked towards the passenger room.





"The location Kuro spoke of, the floating archipelago <Lagoon>, is an airspace of many islands grouped together. They're too small for agricultural plants and we haven't found any precious resources or ecosystems. In all honesty, it's just under the management of the Governmental Sector."

11

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> also has those kinds of islands. However, Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> has the walking observation unit known as Syun-rei. Meimel also constructs barriers so she would realize if there were any sloppy movements within the barrier.

11

The floating archipelago <Lagoon> which people could find no value in using.

For sure, it would be an ideal location for a third party looking for a headquarters.

"You know, sorry for poking at faults right now but what about routine patrols? The floating archipelago <Lagoon> being like that would make it a hotbed for crime so shouldn't you have security personnel going around?"

"As Sheltis-sama has surmised, there are routine patrols for the floating archipelago <Lagoon>. However....."

Kuro held out a single report.

The participants of the investigation, the supervisor, the writer of the document — and only the '

issuer

', Ran, written above that had many checkmarks in red ink.

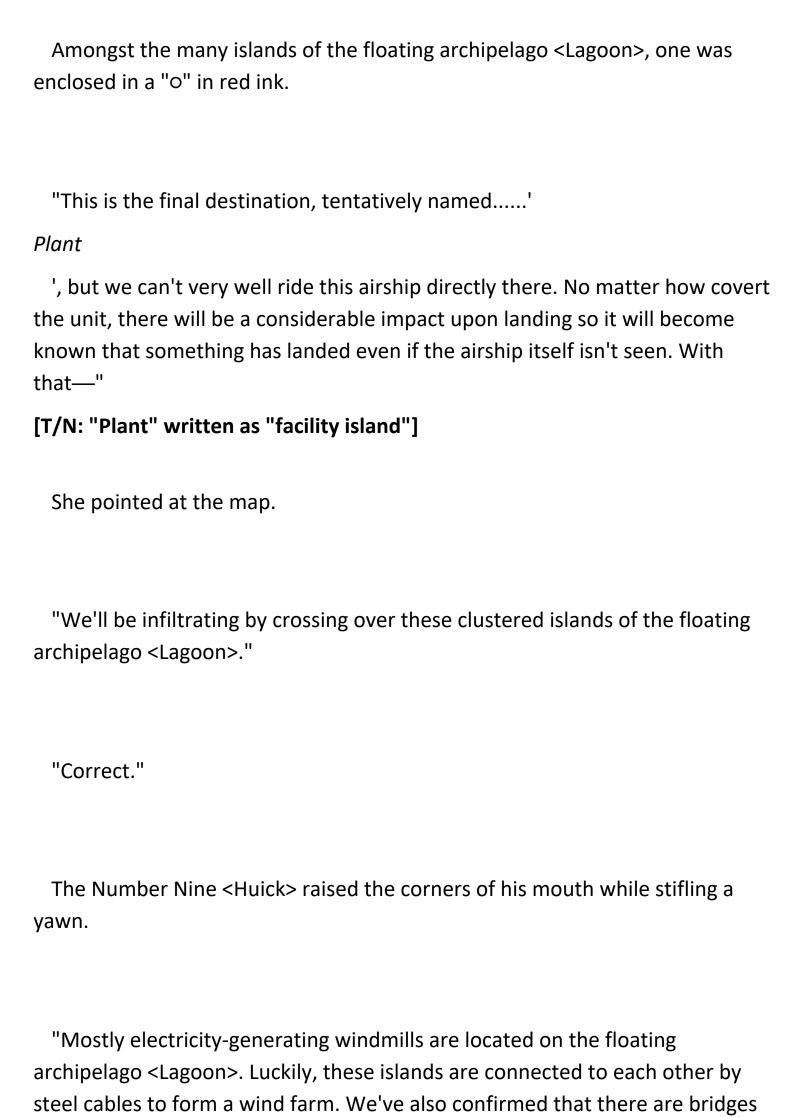
"This is a concealed operation spearheaded by an individual bearing high-ranking authority. The possibility of the government member's secretary being someone from the side of the third organization arose. That he had personally gone for the inspection of the floating archipelago <Lagoon> and skillfully deceived the inspection team."

".....I get that much. Continue."

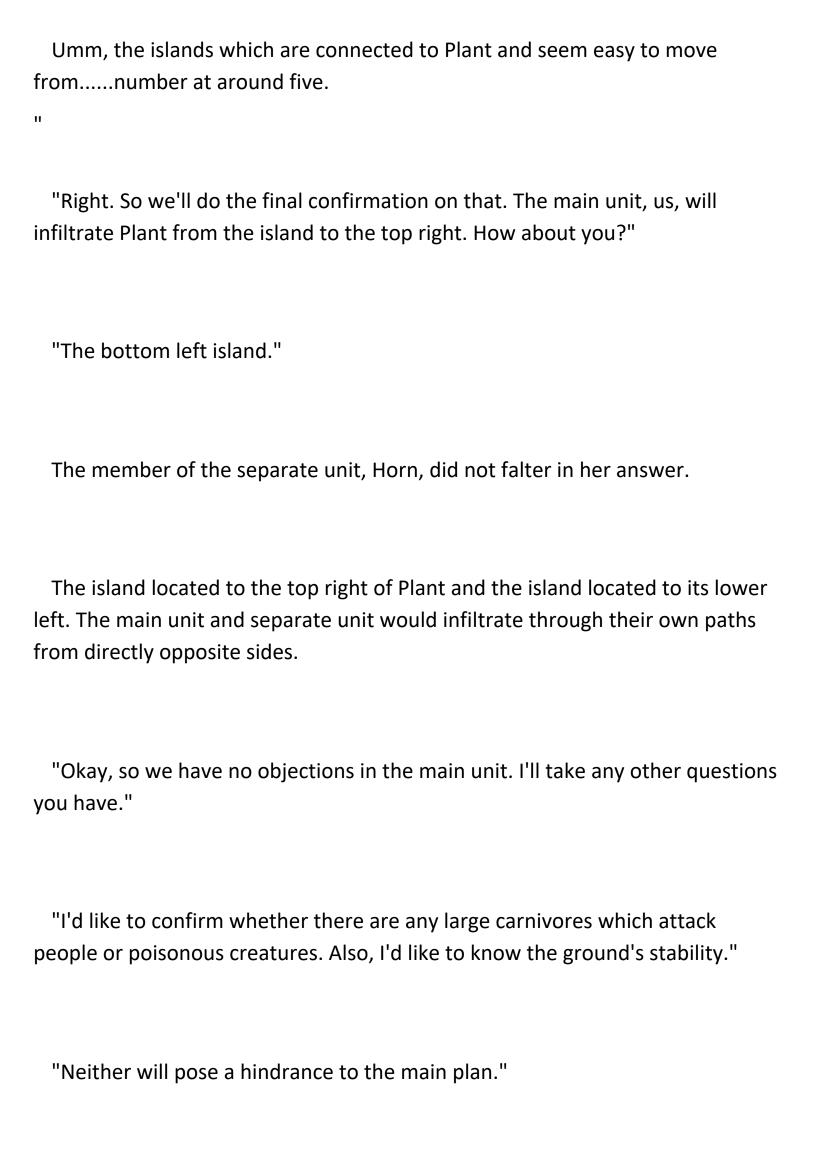
"Yes. The location we will be infiltrating is as I said. You can view the specifics of its location here. It is one of a great deal of the islands of the floating archipelago <Lagoon> crowded together."

[T/N: Apparently each island is called Lagoon, and the entire thing together is also Lagoon. For consistency and because that doesn't really work out that well in English, it's going to have "islands" attached to some instances.]

To Leon, Horn and himself. Kuro passed each of them a folded sheet of paper. Upon the white paper was a map printed only in black ink.



connecting each island. There are also islands which can be crossed from by simply jumping."
The plan to infiltrate Plant was just a matter of the number of islands neighboring it. They wouldn't have an difficulty finding a route with this many islands and it would be easy to evade detection from the third organization.
"Looking at it from their point of view, this island was chosen because there are any number of escape routes for immediate retreat. We're using that to infiltrate."
"Makes sense."
Nodding to the Number Nine <huick>'s words, Sheltis held onto the edge of the map in his hand.</huick>
It'll be easy to return like this as well.
The conditions for the infiltration and return are much better than I expected.
II



Kuro answered. She didn't have anything resembling documents in her hands so she must have done the pertinent research beforehand.
"The main lifeforms on this island are small birds and insects. Also, neither poisonous lifeforms which could affect humans nor carnivores have been sighted. As for the ground, investigation has shown it to be more or less the same as that of the floating continent <orbie clar="">'s Living Districts. Will that suffice, Horn-sama?"</orbie>
"Acknowledged. That will be all from me."
"Then our preparations are setNow then, this would also be a good time to land the airship."
The Number Nine <huick>'s mutter echoed throughout the passenger room.</huick>

"All that's left is a match of intelligence with the other side."

Interlude - Ultramarine

Plip.
Pliplip
The water tank was filled with pale, light blue solution. Small bubbles were floating up and popping, floating up and being eliminated with a dry sound.
"Fufuufufu"
"Ahaa, hahahahaha."
Laughing was mixed in with the sound of air bubbles popping.
"Is that it? That airship."
"Yeah, that's it."
"I wonder if we should tell Igun-I."
п
Yeah, we should. But first we have to report this to Armadyl. Including the pilot, there are seven people?

Sevenhuhbut that co-pilot seat catches my interest.
" Yeah, I can see something blurry like a mirage. It's strange.
Suddenly, the children's laughter which had filled the room disappeared.
A silence spread gently. It was a raw, stinging silence that was born, almost like when a child is sulking.
II .
Well, whatever. Igun-I is the expert for those things.
It was easily a minute by the time the cheery voice echoed out.
" That's right, Igun-I is the expert. That's why we should tell Igun-I too. "

"Yeah, so with that decided, we should get going."
Each of the voices that had been going around instantly went silent in order and then.
"This is a mass transmission to all Lords of Unusual Books ranks from '
Blue
' Neue and '
Green
' Noesis.
Warning — assumed pattern 049 has been detected and the defense system has been activated. Preparations for interception underway."
The perfectly clear voices of the twins traveled through the interior of the facility as if they were singing.

Chapter 3 - Chance Meeting and After

Part 1

Tenketsu Palace, floor 274.

Taking a single step out of the elevator into this floor which was customized for the use of the second Sennenshi, everything from the floor to the ceiling would shine with a rusty blue color.

The rusty blue color was the unhidden color of metallic ground. The thousands of buffering plates and the airships' protective film were made of a special composite metal.

.....Creak!

Those buffering planes screeched as they sunk in. Footprints were gouged into the floor.

"Hmph!"

Stepping down with enough force to warp the buffering plates, she added her own body weight to that force and swung her fist. There was no target or goal; it simply cut through the air. But—

.....! [T/N: A bunch of y were in between these indicating sounds that can't be mimicked.]

The air which was split by the supersonic fist burst. The shockwave borne from a living being which has surpassed the speed of sound rent the air and roared with a sound akin to the cracking of a whip.

"So how is it going for them?"

The girl wiped the sweat trailing down her chin off. Though her clothes were light, consisting of shorts and a tank top, they absorbed her body's sweat and were currently soaked.

"As you heard."

Meimel smiled gently at her partner who continued to train in silence.

"But it might be hard to understand the finer points even if you're informed.

.....Speak of the devil, here's another report."

There was no need to turn her ears to the ceiling speakers.

Umm, it appears that the main unit and separate unit have split up. Ah, Sheltis, Leon and the two from the Governmental Sector have alighted from the airship. They've landed on the edge of the floating archipelago

.....and seem to be heading somewhere."

"It looks like they've split up. It looks like they're heading somewhere.It's hard on us to receive a report with so many 'like's."

Ran sat down where she was with a wry smile.

"It's troubling to have a vague report."

"Come now. Voices can't be heard using clairvoyance so they're trying their best to guess."

".....I feel like I'm trying to crack a code."

"It's not a code—, it's Ymy-speak. Though it's true you need to decipher it."

.....But today's on the better side.

.....I was prepared for the information to be more disorderly.

"By the way, Meimel, what about today's meeting?"

"I'm skipping out. I've also called off today's and tomorrow's Priestess training. Skipping practice once will mess with my condition but it can't be helped this time."

"So you're saying it's that important."

"Yes. After all—"

"After all?"

".....No, ignore that just now. It's nothing."

"I'm curious."

"It's nothing major, okay? Come on, you need to train yourself properly. I'll decipher the Ymy-speak for you."

She scolded Ran who was sitting on the ground and stood up. Looking sidelong at Ran who reluctantly resumed her training, Meimel gently placed a hand to her chest.

—After all, if we make a bad move, they might be wiped out.

Speaking in board game terms, it would be a mistake. It wouldn't have an immediate effect on the big picture but would manifest itself as great malice in the endgame.

.....Just going by the personnel selection, it's optimal.

.....But the opponents and their methods are completely unknown.

The Lords of Unusual Books. Those known were only "Golden" Maha and "Blank" Igun-I.

Playing it off in a feigned manner, Meimel shrugged her shoulders.

Part 2

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 Κı	Ι.,	 .k	1	П	١.			

A small species of bird with vibrant yellow feathers, rarely seen on the floating continent, left behind an adorable chirp as it flew away.

"It is a bird which habitats this section of the floating archipelago . It is known to migrate to the Governmental Sector island before winter and back here after." Kuro looked at the figure passing overhead and recited from memory.

Hehhh. I'm not well-acquainted with that kind of information so I'll keep it in mind. I have to input it.

".....That's fine, but don't forget something important by overwriting it."

Sheltis glanced at machine crystal which was swaying at his chest and followed after the two men in front of him.

The Number Nine

was at the head, Leon was second, Sheltis was third and Kuro was at the end. "But you know, it's humid, ain't itttt. Hey, Kuro, is this really the easiest route? It's humid and there are roots sticking out; this is rough for a walking environment."

"That's because this is the undeveloped floating archipelago ."

[&]quot;To outwit your opponents, you must first deceive your allies."

[&]quot;Nn? Did you say something?"

[&]quot;Nope, no-thing at all."

She said that smoothly and jumped lightly up to the top of a boulder blocking the path. Making such a casual jump while dressed in a black suit that fit her perfectly was truly resemblant of a black cat.

Placing a hand on the brim of his cowboy hat, the Number Nine jumped over a tree root.

Rocky terrain.

There were countless ash brown rocks of varying sizes and giant trees were sticking out from the gaps between them. It was a more splendid sight than a forest. However, it seemed like it would cause one to trip over a tree root or rock if he or she wasn't paying attention.

"But you know, this is good weather. It makes me want to go fishing if I weren't on this pain-in-the-ass job."

The Number Nine

said that in a carefree tone.

Kuro puffed her cheeks slightly and crossed her arms. Looking at her from the corner of his eye, Sheltis called out to the Number Nine in front.

"The first one in the Governmental Sector to realize the presence of the Lords of Unusual Books was Huick-sama and Huick-sama was the one who said, 'Then I'll go.' when we were lacking information and came up with a plan to infiltrate the third organization's base."

He didn't answer, his subordinate did.

[&]quot;My, what splendid carriage." [T/N: Alternatively, "bearing".]

[&]quot;Well, she is my tag-along, you know? You can't call her a desk worker lacking in exercise."

[&]quot;I wonder who the one who came up with that pain-in-the-ass job was."

[&]quot;.....I get it, I get it, so stop poking me in the back, Kuro."

[&]quot;When this is over, I'll be requesting a special reward. Also, danger pay, overtime pay and holiday work pay."

[&]quot;Righty, leave it to me, I'll pay you three times as much as you request."

[&]quot;Even though you have no intention of paying."

[&]quot;.....Say, about just now."

[&]quot;Yeah? What's up, nii-chan, being so formal?"

[&]quot;What was that that was mentioned just now? About you coming up with this job?"

"At any rate, it's a mysterious enemy organization's base. If we couldn't find anybody to name themselves for the infiltration unit, then he would head for the enemy's territory himself......what a headache."

"That's quite the resolution."

Whether out of commendation or surprise, Leon raised one eyebrow.

"Even in

Tenketsu Palace

, how we will deal with the third organization is still under deliberation. It's because there was a suggestion from the Governmental Sector that a just cause to mobilize the Sennenshi was formed — is what Meimel said."

"Are those words of praise?"

"The fact that Meimel went along with it means it was a good opportunity." Leon's reply was blunt but its meaning was important.

"I agree. We'd have just played into the enemy's hands if we took it slow." The fact that Golden and Igun-I attacked the Governmental Sector was more convincing evidence than anything else.

Attacking before their information could be read from Mikuva's Crimson Eye should have been their goal. However, in reality, the Number Nine, had pulled out that information beforehand.

"What's more, you planned to break in with just the two of you if the rest of us didn't come along?"

"I'm sensitive despite how I look."

While looking at the rocks underfoot.

"There are stiff elders and stubborn co-workers but I don't not like the current Governmental Sector. The meals are delicious and it's basically peaceful, and there are subordinates who do the work so I can even do my hobby, fishing." ".....My wages."

"But now there's a group that seems like it will utterly destroy that situation. It can't be helped that having those kinds of guys loitering around bugs me. That's why I'm going to confirm it. I don't know if I can completely unveil their plan but I can at least get a base."

The footsteps of the executive who was facing forward did not stop even temporarily.

"So how is it? We've actually come to look at the island. We'll be at our

destination shortly."

Me, me! I was imagining a narrow floating archipelago

island but it doesn't look like that now that we're on it.

"It should be just short of two kilometers across. At any rate......and speak of the devil."

The Number Nine

climbed straight up a rock hill and folded his arms.

The glint in his eye became slightly sharper as he looked down — at the coast of the floating archipelago island opposite theirs, floating not even ten meters away.

.....That's it.

11

.....The Plant which is hiding the third organization's base.

My, that's amazing. It's close enough that it wouldn't be strange if rather than neighboring, they were touching.

"That's what I said. We can cross with just a little jump. By the way, the island the nee-chan in the separate unit chose is about the same."

Tap.

The Number Nine

kicked away the small pebbles at his feet and began doing stretches.

"The other coast is......just under six meters away. The ground will crumble if we land right on the edge so it should be seven meters with allowance. Factoring in the headwind and side winds, it's nine meters. We'll jump using the fundamentals of long jumping. If you fail, it's free fall, but you'll end up on a direct course to death by even falling into the Garden of Corrupted Song."

11													ı	ı
	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		

.....Falling to the Garden of Corrupted Song.

Looking down from the edge of the floating archipelago 's cliff, he could see the blue crystal ocean created by Hyouketsu Kyoukai down in the distance.

Squinting, he could even confirm black barriers swirling within.

- —It's this close-by.
- —People are living this close to the Garden of Corrupted Song.
- "Ohh, what's up, nii-chan? Your lips are shut so tight together; are you bad at long jumps?"
- ".....I'll be fine. I can do it."

He clenched his fist so he wouldn't have to speak.

- "Kuro? Can you do it?"
- "My personal record for the long jump is 13.7 meters. That's with a suit and high heels."
- "Ah— is that so? Then there's no problem.....well then."

The Number Nine

flicked the brim of his hat.

"Follow starting from those with resolve."

With a short approach run, he jumped towards the opposite coast and Sheltis followed after him once again.

Part 3

The sea of trees was overgrown and dense.

Large trees with thick and rough trunks were lined up in the dark forest. There were many layers of strange vines or creepers wrapped around the trunks and the bugs on the thin ends were also mysterious.

".....Looks just like every other day."

Horn snorted and and looked away from the giant tree ahead of her.

Having gone on patrols of the Biotope with her older sister constantly, strange trees and mysterious bugs were common knowledge to her. She would not be surprised if she were to just keep up the minimum of caution.

"I'm twenty minutes behind the main unit. I think that should be just right?"

She had a long-range rifle slung over her left shoulder and her favored machine pistol in her right hand. Upon her hip were reserve magazines and a communicator.

—My mission is to aid the main unit.

She would sneak onto Plant via an alternate route from the main unit.

Afterwards, she would infiltrate the base some time after the main unit and group up with them if they had succeeded in safely stealing information. If the main unit became engaged in combat with the enemy, she would support them by following the instruction of Ymy who was observing.

.....At any rate, I have to sneak onto Plant and wait nearby the base.

.....After that, I wait for the main unit or Ymy's orders.

The minimal personnel was good for covert operations like this. She had heard that the combined unit's members were selected by Meimel but it was a splendid choice for the one left in charge of governing the tower by the Queen.Now then.

The airship's camouflage blended it in with the surrounding greenery. Horn made a large nod to Eyriey who was showing her face from the pilot's window. "Add on one more thing to that. If you don't receive contact from any of us—" "Yeah?"

"Return to

Tenketsu Palace

with just the two of you. There's no need to wait for us."

Part 4

—A research facility.

The walls of the rectangular structure were grey. There were no windows and neither wiring nor plumbing was jutting out of the walls. The perfectly flat wall

[&]quot;You remember what I said just before?"

[&]quot;Of course. I'll remain on standby until I'm contacted by someone from the main unit or Horn-nee."

[&]quot;Good job."

was completely covered in moss and its singular green color seemed to blend it in with the surrounding forest.

"Leon, doesn't this look familiar?"

"Yeah. It looks like the other floating archipelago that other time.....is this some kind of joke?"

Leon, who was standing beside him, made a rare sigh.

"It's nothing strange.

Tenketsu Palace

also often sets up strata or environmental observation facilities like this." Kuro surveyed the facility ahead and gently shook her head.

"In other words, it's the same as the other one

Tenketsu Palace

identified to us."

That was the origin of the conference between

Tenketsu Palace

and the Governmental Sector.

The unmanned research facility had been remodeled by the third organization. There had been a Yuugenshu breeding tank set up before but this one was being used as a base as-is.

"This was as much as Kuro saw using Mikuva's Crimson Eye. Both Kuro and I don't know the interior but they're somehow deceiving the regularly scheduled patrols."

".....I think it's underground."

Sheltis bit down on his lip at the Number Nine 's whisper.

"......If it's the exact same as before, that means they're below here."

He glared at the ground underfoot.

The aboveground research facility was just a fake and the real one was an underground floor made by extension. That's why it was meaningless no matter how many inferences were made while aboveground.

"Kuro."

"Yes. Sheltis-sama and Leon-sama, please step back."

Taking a step out front, Kuro took a yellow key out of her breast pocket. She

advanced directly to the central door like that. She soundlessly inserted the key into the rusted brass lock.

-.....Click.

Shortly after, the metal lock fell to the ground.

"Only one side can be opened. Just in case, don't stand in front of the doorway."

While also stepping aside herself, Kuro pulled on the door handle. The grating sound of rusted metal rubbing echoed.

.....Creak.

Only a dim space lay on the other side of the completely open door.

"Well, this is as expected."

The Number Nine

patted Kuro's shoulder with a slight wry smile. However he kept that act moderate and turned to them, pointing beyond the door.

"You've seen this once before, right? Wouldn't we be more familiar with the structure from ahead of here?"

"Ah, but I wasn't with Leon....."

The ones who were with Leon at that time were Eyriey and Yuto. The one who was acting together with him was Monica so the routes they'd taken to enter the research facility were different.

"I entered this way but I think Leon entered through a secret passageway. If I remember, a path continued underground and the it had to be unlocked from Leon's side."

"That's how it was.Shall we try it since I was told the release code by Eyriey?"

"In that case, I guess I'll go along too. Kuro, you stick here with nii-chan and do something like introduce yourself again if you like."

Following after Leon, the Number Nine also headed outside.

Only the two of them, he and Kuro who was a Governmental Sector executive, were left behind.

.....Self-introductions.

......Come to think of it, besides her name and affiliation, I don't know anything about her.

"Why did you volunteer for this unit?"

"---Eh."

He leaked out a voice without thinking at her sudden whisper.

"Meimel-sama spearheaded this operation. Around you were only Priestesses and Sennenshi who outrank you. Amongst them, the first to raise their hand at Meimel's appeal was you."

Kuro swept aside her sidebangs which were a dark green nearing black. Her eyes reflected not a shred of emotion and only stared at him dispassionately.

"I know that the other day when Ymy-sama visited the Governmental Sector, your unit was assigned to travel together with her as her escorts. Did you volunteer because you view this mission as a continuation of that one?"

"No way. That's a different mission."

"Then why? You are a Cadet Guard. He may act like that, but Huick of the Governmental Sector also possesses authority equivalent to a Sennenshi of

Tenketsu Palace

. You should not possess power to silence those around you with the simple words 'Then let's have a look.'"

It was a general rule that Cadet Guards would act like Cadet Guards and focus on training. For an outsider like her, his desire to participate in this mission was very unexpected.

"Am I wrong?"

".....Yeah, that's why I raised my hand first. Because I wanted to convey that I wanted to go."

"That you wanted to go? Neither a feeling of obligation nor responsibility, you truly personally wished to go?.....My apologies but I cannot think of any other reason for that beyond creating achievements."

A mora.

Inserting a wordless moment, she suddenly leaked a smile.

".....However, I can't see you being that kind of ambitious person. I cannot think of the reason you joined this mission."

I give up — he watched as she shrugged and jested.

"It's the same reason as Huick's."

"The same as Huick-sama's?"

"I can't let it slide. Somebody precious to me is in the tower and The Lords of Unusual Books are causing that person unrest so.....wouldn't it stand to reason

that I can't let it slide? That's why I'd like to settle this myself for that person."

"......"

She stared blankly at him.

"You, a Cadet Guard? You can't leave it up to the Sennenshi and Priestesses?"
"......That's right. I really do want to puff out my chest with pride."

His childhood friend had waited at the highest floor of the tower all this time. In order for him to stand proudly before she who had continued to wait all alone, he wanted to bring closure to the matters of his mateki and the Garden of Corrupted Song.

"Is that strange?"

"Is that important person a woman?"

"Eh?"

"I think the woman you spoke of is definitely happy."

The Governmental Sector woman's appraising gaze softened and she nodded.

".....That would be nice."

"I would think so if I were her. After that, for you to return safe——!" At the sudden tremor underfoot, Kuro crouched down.

.....Rumble, rumble.

The floorboards continued to vibrate slightly and a portion raised a sound, sinking into the ground. The surrounding floorboards folded up and headed underground.

"It's as was reported."

Kuro blinked as she looked down at the stairs wrapped in darkness which led underground.

"Yo, how's it going on that end?"

With Leon in tow, the Number Nine appeared from the doorway ahead of them. He walked to the middle of the room leisurely with his hand in his pocket, a carefree appearance.

"Oh, this is something."

It's as you see—. It really did have the same construction as the floating archipelago

from last time."

"Well that's a cause for celebration. see, this really is quite something. I wonder just when they managed to perform such large-scale construction."

The Number Nine

lightly kicked the first step on the staircase and confirmed its feeling. Having decided it could be ventured, he nodded slightly and began walking with the same gait as always.

.....The same as before, huh.

While confirming the conditions of the Number Nine and Leon who were walking ahead of him, he also took care of the feeling from his feet as he went. There were no traps last time but that didn't mean there wouldn't be any this time.

It would be suspicious if the materials for the staircase were to change suddenly.

"It'll be great if the traps are so kind.It'd be best if there were no traps at all though."

Straining his eyes to stare at the ceiling, there was a dull setup with a thin metal plate stuck there. The wall to the side was also the same. It was also difficult to call the construction of the staircase neat.

"Sheltis."

With his back still turned, Leon suddenly called to him.

"We received a message from Horn not long ago. She said she'd also reached the island and was heading here."

"Got it.By the way, will she know about this place on her own?"

"She has a guide."

—Syun-rei and Ymy.

The two Priestesses were keeping constant watch over the main unit from back at the floating continent using clairvoyance. They knew the location of the research facility so they would convey that information to the separate unit.As expected of them, we're this far out and still within their clairvoyance range.

Then.

"It looks like we'll get through this without fear of traps."

At the same time as those words, the figure of the Number Nine who was walking ahead disappeared.

"A corner?"

"It appears to be the destination."

A massive corridor that continued for who-knows-how-long.

.....It's different from the previous research facility.

At that time, they had come out to an enormous floor immediately after descending the stairs. He remembered there were fallen over computers, all in black, here and there and countless cables running underfoot. There was but a single one in this endlessly stretching corridor.

"This is.....quite the scale. I can't see the end."

The Number Nine

had passed the point of being tense and instead was speechless in amazement.

I believe this island's underground was gouged out to resemble an anthill.

".....That's quite the lightning fast construction."

The walls and floor were also of simplistic construction, covered only by grey metal plates. The electrical lines for the ceiling lights were also visible. If some shock were to sever the lines, the entire corridor's lighting would fall.

Now then, just how far does this passage continue?

"No idea. Well, let's just keep going without worrying about that. There's no such thing as being covert with a straight path. Let's just continue and hope we don't run into anybody."

The Number Nine

continued on with a gait that could be taken as carefree. But without having taken many steps, he suddenly half-turned his face in their direction.

"Kuro."

"Yes."

"Only worry about the back. I'd prefer not to get pincered in this kind of corridor."

"If for example—"

Interrupting the Number Nine 's words, Sheltis continued.

"they come from the front?"

"Not meeting them is ideal......but it's impossible to hide in this kind of corridor. While praying we don't meet them, if we do, the first thing to think of is how to escape. We didn't come here to fight a battle. Though, I would like to get a bare minimum of information."

The Number Nine

spoke in a somewhat quiet voice.

"If the ones we run across are somatic cell organisms, then we should get information with the leading question and run away after that. The annoying case is if it's a fight lover who attacks without care for what we say, so if that happens—....."

Suddenly, the Number Nine closed his mouth partway through his words. Stop — his right hand which was held up horizontally wordlessly conveyed that.

"...."

He was glaring at the right hand-side wall ahead of them. He stared without blinking at that wall which was not even slightly different from the walls they'd passed thus far.

"You guys, don't get discovered by this wall."

The Governmental Sector executive suddenly smiled fearlessly.

"What?"

"An active optical sensor. Do you know what an infrared diode and phototransistor are? They're basically light detectors."

".....Like an automatic door's sensor?"

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That's a passive infrared sensor. This one's active so it's a little more troublesome.

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Leon's expression distorted in doubt and he sighed.

In contrast, machine crystal continued in a matter-of-fact and quiet tone.

The majority of passive sensors are, if I had to say, limited to sensing a person's body heat. However, this active sensor will detect anything that interrupts the infrared rays, whether it be a person or clothing.But that's amazing.

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"Mm?"

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I would have pointed out that infrared sensor if you had kept going a little longer without noticing it. You did well to notice it yourself.

"Evo

"Even if I'm like this, I'm sensitive, you see."

The Number Nine

indicated a small crack with his chin. It was a fissure little more than a few centimetres. So an optical device was buried in the shadow of that.

".....They're good. The construction looks old-fashioned but if you unmask it, that's a high-end optical sensor trap."

Leon muttered in a very quiet voice as he clenched his fists.

"It seems to be the type of stronghold we're not good with. Sheltis, did you notice?"

".....Unfortunately, it's outside my field of specialty."

At

Tenketsu Palace

, this was the kind of thing that spies rather than Guards would learn. Or possibly, Kagura who was deeply knowledgeable about mechanics would have seen through it.

"No excuses like 'It's my first time encountering this.""

With both hands and knees against the floor, the Number Nine advanced in a posture that was basically crawling. After him went Leon and then Sheltis.

Around ten metres.

Sometimes they would crawl, sometimes they would sidle along the wall and other times they would jump to slip past the optical sensors.

".....Phew. For the time being, the trap area is done. Right?"

Yes. There are no responses on my sensors for the time being.

"That's great. But here's something difficult again."

Having cleared the section of the corridor covered in sensors, the Number Nine folded his arms.

"Left or right, which do you guys wanna go down?"

The corridor split in two.

After having passed through such a heavily trapped area, both of them probably lead to important areas.

"If we're gonna check both, then we might as well start with the right."

"That was quick. Well then, respecting Sennenshi-sama's opinion—"

"That's no good—. We won't let you go, you know?"

"Yup, we won't let you."

Two similar voices.

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It wasn't through an amplifier, it was like they were directly echoing in their heads.

Amazing, amazing, you got through the optical sensors.

Yup. As expected, they were poor quality so they didn't help. Even though we told Natraja so much that sensors were unnecessary with us here.

Ahahaha – shrill echoing laughter.

".....What's this, are these guys"

That's right, hat-wearing onii-chan. We've been watching you since you were

closing in on an airship.

"Yup, we were watching. Since that's our job."

"I see, I see.....I'll praise you for not calling me an oji-san, but didn't anybody teach you that peeping is a bad hobby?"

The Number Nine

openly warped his expression and clicked his tongue.

"You've been watching us since we got on the airship and came? There's no way brats can pull off that kind of clairvoyance and telepathy. Who are you?"

"Ah. That's right, Neue, let's do our "self-introductions"."

"Okay. Let's do them. Igun-I also said that it's "good manners" to name yourself."

.....lgun-l.

The twins inadvertently spoke that name. That meant that these twins were also one of them.

"I am Neue. Number six of the Lords of Unusual Books, 'Blue' Neue."

"I am Noesis. Number five of the Lords of Unusual Books, 'Green' Noesis."

""Four intruders detected, now capturing.""

.....Zuu.....zuzuuuu.

A gigantic mass shook a section of the corridor. It slowly edged nearer.

"To the right!?"

In an instant, Leon detected that shadow and went on guard.

To the right side of the forked corridor — the first thing that appeared was a massive steel-colored object that filled the corridor.

"Placing a mechanical soldier in this cramped hallway.....do they not mind a section of it being destroyed?"

The female executive shook her head in amazement.

It was a mechanical soldier with four legs protected by black armor. Its right hand was a shield and its left hand tapered off and it itself was transformed into a gigantic machine gun.

.....It resembles the one I saw back in the Governmental Sector's Sanctuary!? It was still fresh in his mind. Protected by that hefty armor and shinryoku spells, it was an opponent he couldn't deal sufficient damage to with his twin swords.

Ehehe, we know about the dual sword user onii-chan. Igun-I told us.

You don't match up well with this, right? Its armor is very—

"Doesn't matter."

The flash of a sword cut off Neue and Noesis' laughs.

—Shinggg.

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The great sword was swung in a straight line from ceiling to floor. The sword tip which was swung very quickly and very easily made a light sound as it touched the floor.

Following that was the sound of something solid cracking. That sound came from the mechanical soldier they had just seen coming to attack them.

Ksh.....sh.....kshhh.....

As the sound gradually grew, the web of fissures in the mechanical soldier's head armor stretched out.

"Well done."

"It's nothing major enough to be praised for."

Leon had his sword pierced into the ground.

"It only took one strike anyway."

Behind him. With its central machinery in the head destroyed through its armor, the mechanical soldier fell over face-up with a thunderous noise.

"Phewww! As expected of a Priestess' escort, huh, Kuro?"

"Yes. I didn't think there was anybody other than Zeadoll-sama would could render that kind of heavily armored mechanical soldier powerless in one strike."

The Number Nine

whistled and clapped.

"Waah, that was amazing, Noesis. Did you see?"

Yeah, it was amazing, Neue. He beat it so quickly. Natraja told us to 'buy enough time for a shower' but it's not happening.

I wonder who's stronger between this great sword onii-san and Armadel? "Eh-. That would be Armadel." The twins whispered to each other and laughed. "You can't go back anymore." Yeah, you can't go back anymore. Come out, virtuals. Immediately after. The wall in the direction they'd come from collapsed, creating a gigantic hole. —Zaa.....zazaa..... Perfectly orderly, countless footsteps came from the hole. Virtuals, could that mean? "Maha!?" Sheltis was the first to react to the robed spellcaster that appeared in the corridor. These clones that he had met with in the Nature District and the Governmental Sector were unforgettable. Each one was a monster capable of destroying Regular Guard units from Tenketsu PalaceMaha's clones to the rear. If another mechanical soldier appears ahead of us, we'll be boxed in!In that case, which way is better!? "Run!" He instinctively chose the right passageway that the mechanical soldier had appeared from and started running. Just by sensing their presences, he could tell that the Number Nine and Kuro were behind him with Leon in the back.The more important the location, the more severe the security should be.In that case, the logical choice is the passage that the mechanical soldier

п

appeared from.

"Sheesh, what a cautious lot. Is that him? Is that the Lord of Unusual Books called Maha?"

The Number Nine

spat that out with disdain.

"That was a clone. But.....the clone I fought at the Nature District had a much nastier strength than that big mechanical soldier."

"That's not very appealing. But that's just how serious they are."

Donning only a smile, the Number Nine accelerated.

"Change of plans. We only intended to look around and head back but we're being watched by those twins. You guys, we're gonna bust into the deepest part of this base by force."

"No objections here."

"I was planning on doing that from the start."

"Only if I get danger pay, overtime pay and a special bonus."

"—You guys aren't a bad party for one formed out-of-nowhere."

The Number Nine

's voice grew lively as he looked over the corridor.

About 20 meters ahead. Small autonomous soldiers appeared from both branches of the next fork in the road. Each one had a shotgun, a tazer or other varieties of guns.

I believe they're standalone. Shall we go around them?

" [T/N: Standalone as in independent units (no control).]

"Nahhh, we can just force our way through."

The Number Nine

declared that with razor-like thin chakrams held between his fingers.

"It's a battle of obstinance from this point on."

Part 5

Tenketsu Palace
, floor 287. "Sheltis!?"
Ymy sprung up from the bed she was lying on, raising her upper body. "Syun-rei, just what's going on?"
Just when she thought Sheltis and the others had come to a stop in the corridor, a giant mechanical soldier suddenly appeared from further in. Though
Leon cut it down with a single slash, the four people weren't relieved and dashed off in a hurry.
Is there a warning bell going off over there?If so, were they discovered by the enemy?
There was no sound accompanying the image sent by Syun-rei. Even if a
warning bell was set off or somebody's voice was coming from speakers, but as they were confirming it through clairvoyance, they could do nothing but speculate.
But she understood that Sheltis' expression was completely different from just a while ago.
"Shinryoku detected."
Syun-rei's tiny, transient voice.
"Shinryoku?"
п
I don't knowbutthis might belong-
rangetelepathy, beingusedthere

"H-Huh? Syun-rei, your voice is too quiet-" The telepathy from her was getting quieter very quickly. No, it's not that her voice was getting quieter. Is this noise? It's like having a conversation in the middle of a storm. ".....ference....." Interference. Faster than Ymy could understand the meaning of that word.Ah–ah–..... Ahh, finally the detection succeeded.Noie, I'm tired, that was a lot of work. When we decided to put together this complicated spell when we only knew that it was somebody from Tenketsu Palace , this was mostly expected." —Fh? A voice that she had never heard cut in on Syun-rei's telepathy. "I think so too. It's probably a Priestess."

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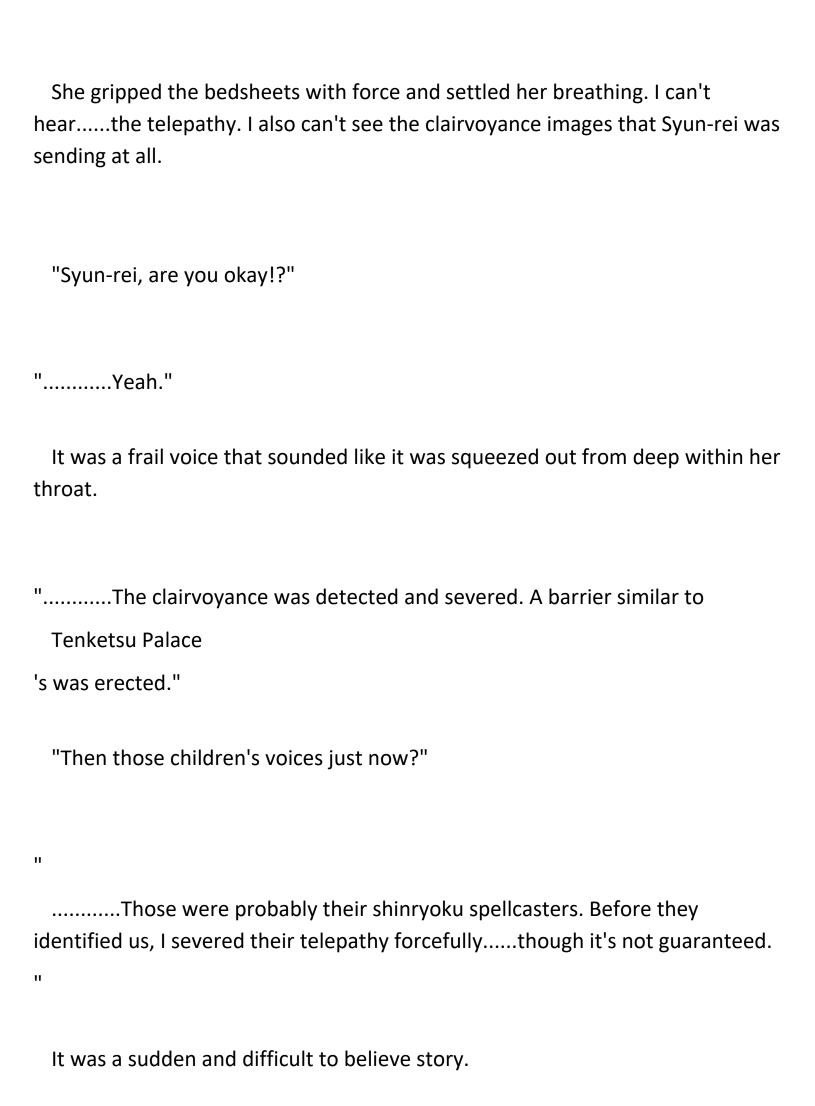
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Yeah, the Priestesses are suspect. Since they managed to resist our layered

interference. Even amongst the Priestesses, it has to be one specialized in shinryoku spells.
II
This voice?
She had never heard it before. But it definitely said that its detection succeeded just now. Could it be that these two had detected Syun-rei's clairvoyance and tracked it back to here?
11
Hello, unknown Priestess. We'll get straight to the point: we won't let you view what happens beyond this.
п
п
Yeah, we won't let you. We have lots of precious, precious secrets. Natraja said we can't allow clairvoyance. So we'll be forcibly cutting you off~?
II
—Zap.
"Ouch!"
Her body bent backwards from the intense pain that ran through her ears.
"AhWhathappened?"



—They're on par with Syun-rei in territory-type spells? She didn't know the opponents' ages, but judging from the feel of their voices, they were fairly young children. They might be five or six years younger than them. ".....It was an unknown spell." "They said ' *layered interference* ' just now, didn't they?" Priestesses also used combined spells between multiple people. For example, Triple Chained Chant " would be representative but she had never heard of an interference technique like that. —Was it a spell that was developed in complete isolation from Tenketsu Palace ? "What about clairvoyance?"

If we try, it'll probably just be detected and severed again. It might end with our identities being detected this time too.
II .
"I see."
Was this impatience or frustration? Pressed by the emotions coming to a boil, Ymy clenched her molars.
With this, the method to confirm Sheltis and the others' safeties has disappeared. On the other hand, based on the voices from just now, they third organization should have recognized the presence of intruders.
I have to think.
The main unit should also be waiting for information from Tenketsu Palace
now that things had gotten to this. But they couldn't use telepathy which was essential. If they were intercepted like just now, then they would end up having the information used against them instead.
I think we can only contact them via
Tenketsu Palace
's hidden lines."

Not through telepathy but communicators.

If I'm right, Cadres Guard Ishtar should have a communicator that's connected to Horn from the separate unit.

".....What should we do?"

Springing off the bed, Ymy left her room and ran down the hall.

Part 6

Autonomous mechanical soldiers were piled up high in the corridor.

All of them had the voltage unit in their chests destroyed and showed not a hint of movement.

"This side's done. How about you?"

"Looks okay. They've been completely rendered powerless."

Not taking his eyes off the autonomous mechanical soldiers underfoot, Sheltis moved only his neck to answer Leon.

Sheltis has eight units and Leon has nine. Thus, Leon wins.

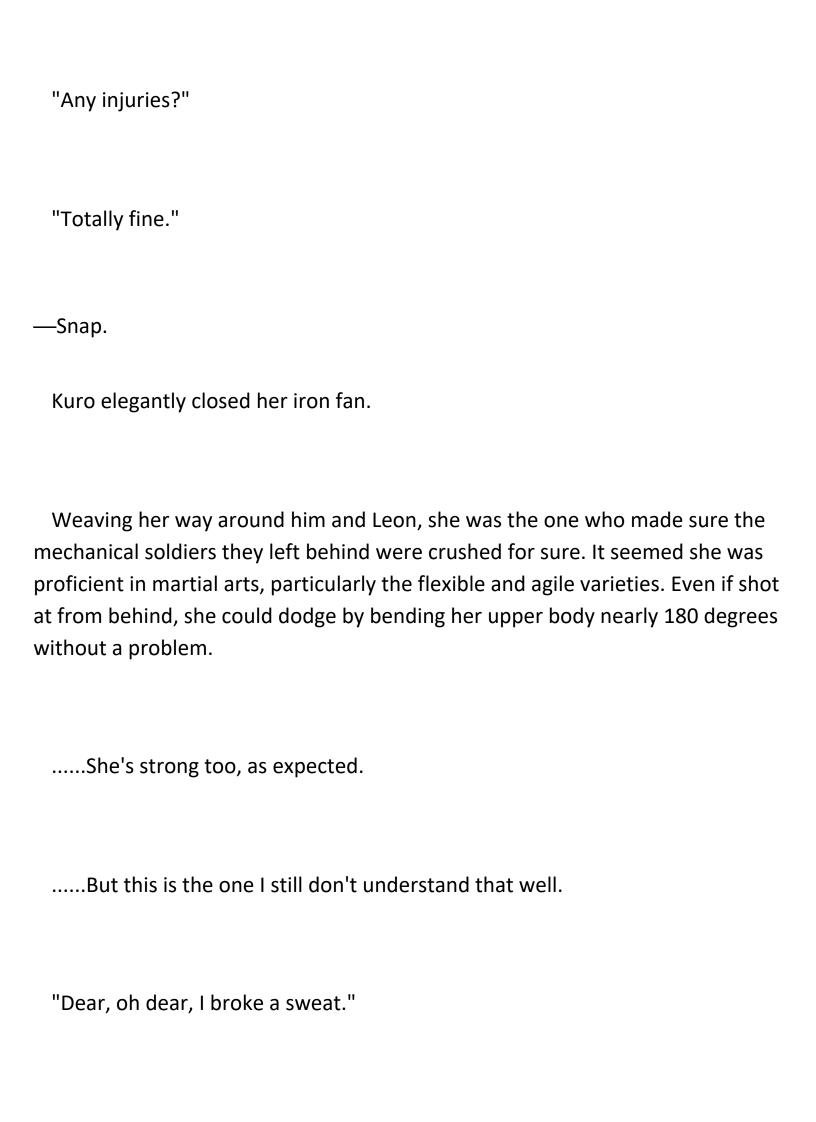
"Of course."

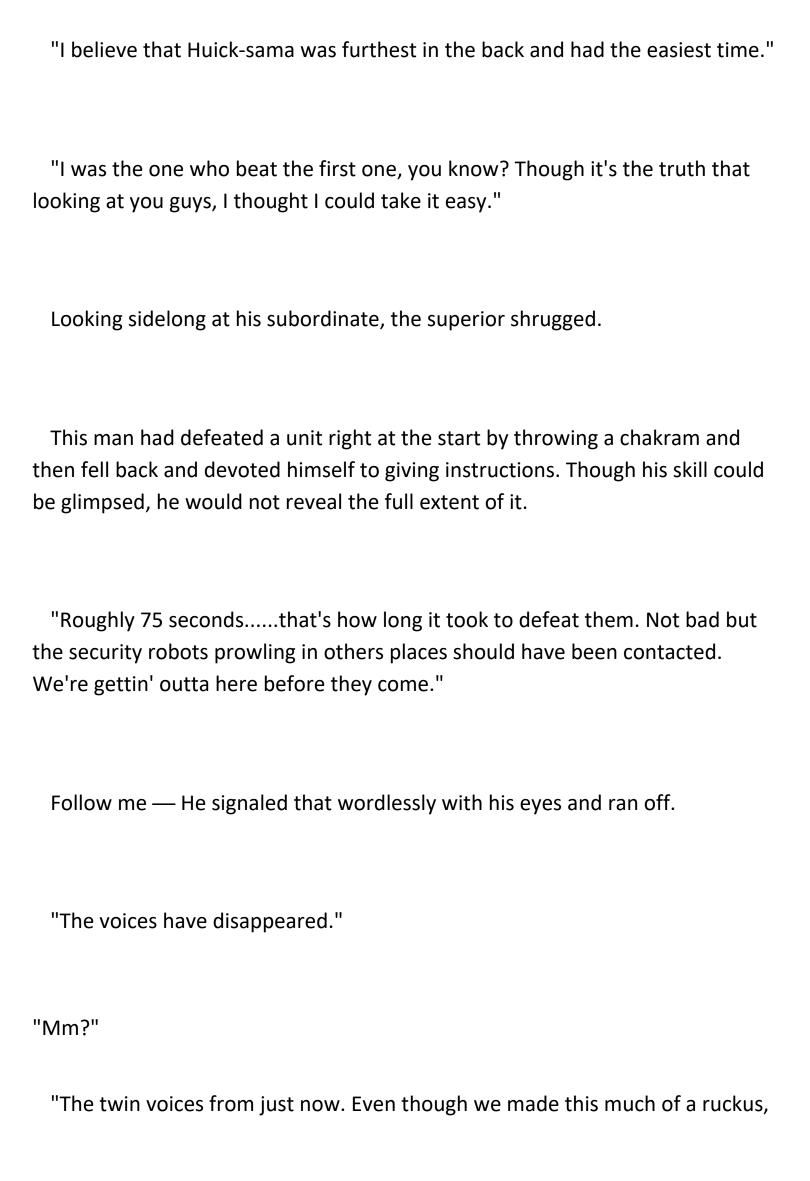
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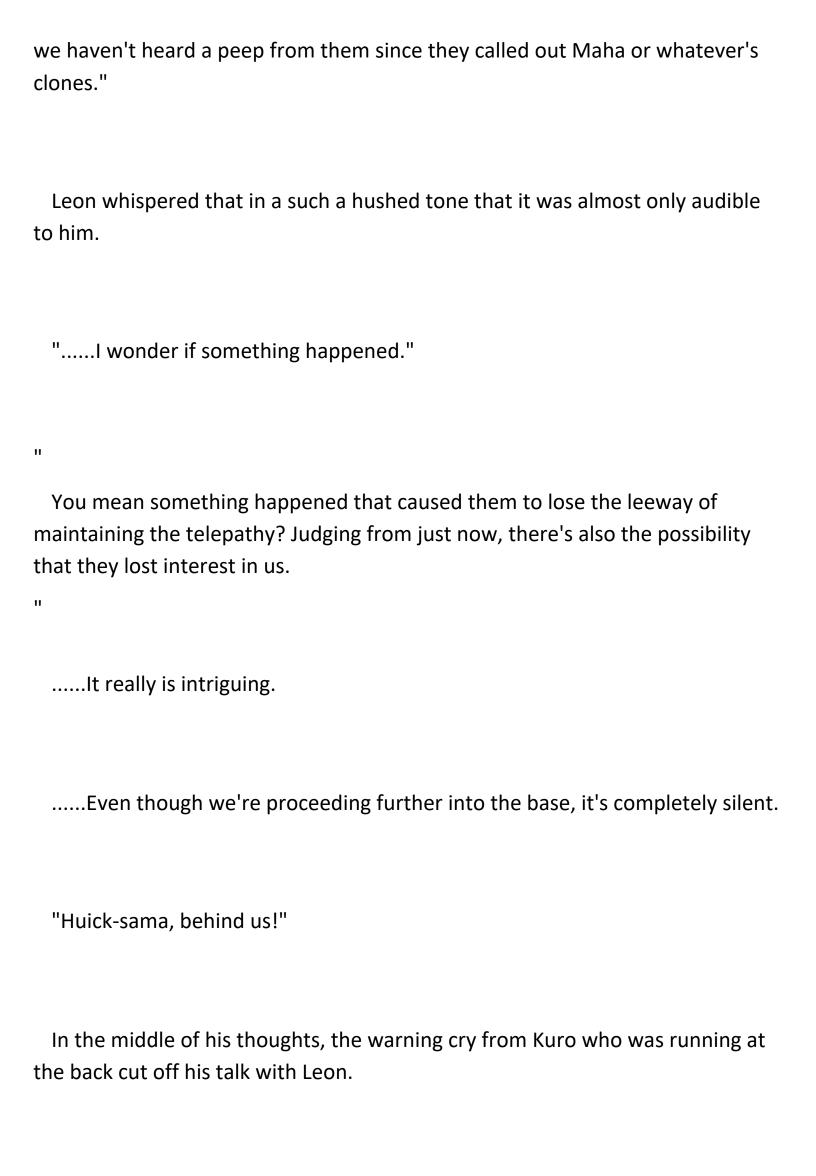
".....No, the enemies just happened to be more concentrated near Leon."

He responded with a pout. With that expression still on, he patted his jacket; there was nothing like a wound. Leon hadn't taken a single gunshot to his white longcoat, so it was important.

[&]quot;Syun-rei, report to Meimel. I'll go speak with Ishtar-san!"







Around the corner they had come from. The hooded spellcasters appeared from there. In addition, there was a large beast probably created with the Golden Hexahedral spells.

"They caught up!?"

"That battle just now ate up time. Hurry up. If we end up fighting them, it'll take all day."

Holding down his cattleman hat so it wouldn't fly off, the Number Nine sped up. It was an all-out sprint with no checking for traps, only devoted to putting distance between them and the enemy behind.

".....Shall I be a decoy?"

"Moron, don't be having such dark thoughts. If somebody gets caught and turned into a hostage, it'll only spell trouble."

Scolding Kuro who had pulled out her iron fan, the superior sped up even more. Rounding the corner, they ran dozens of floors down in stairs, deeper and deeper — towards the innermost depths.

At that time, there was a change in the composition of the walls.

It had been just makeshift walls of iron plates but now it was made of thick and solid stone. The ceiling lighting was large and embedded and the flooring was a crimson carpet.

".....It's sure gotten spiffy."

A sense of tension was mixed into the Number Nine 's voice.

That was a given considering how radically different the construction was until now. Even the air was heavy, as befitting the depths of a base.

—The pressure is heavy to the point that it's hard to breathe.

Finally.

"So this is the last one, huh." Without dropping speed, the Number Nine gazed ahead. A large corridor split into three. All the corridors up to here had had only two choices, left or right. This one added a path straight ahead for a total of three splits. So far, they had stayed together as four and gone down only one path.
But This is
Everyone was silent. That was because they all understood without words. That this was where the party would splitThey're here.
Beyond this corridor is someone from the third organization. A heavy pressure could be felt from within even if they tried to ignore it. It wasn't one or two people. This presence was of three people. Each of them was waiting ahead of the one of the three passages. Then.
"I'm going straight."
Leon was the first to move. "Sheltis."
"ThenI'm heading right."
Hearing that, the female executive opened her mouth.
"Huick-sama, that means we are"
"To the left. Not bad. Rather than dragging our feet here, let's just do it decisively."

With something akin to curiosity visible in his eyes, he led Kuro and turned to the left.
"The limit is two hours. Everybody is to return to the airship by that time. Just to get this out there, I'm not waiting for you if you're late by a minute or even a second!"
"This will only take an hour."
"Same."
Opposite of the Number Nine
, he headed right. Nodding towards Leon who was pushing forward through the center, Sheltis took a breath. "Ilis." "
Constructing the dual swords' blades —— fixing a silver monad as the core, coating it in Hyouketsu Kyoukai's azure crystals. Destruction limit set to sevenfold.

From the dual blades that were just hilts stretched a silver line, and shining azure wrapped around that to form the body of the swords.

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I will focus on maintaining the blades in silent mode. Be careful.

11

The blue radiance of the crystal faded to gray. It was machine crystal 'automated setting. When they knew ahead of time that combat against a powerful opponent was inevitable, she would limit her functions to audio recording only and concentrate all excess computational power to maintaining and repairing the dual swords.

".....Thank you."

There was no response from machine crystal. Of course, this conversation was recorded but as long as he did not order the release of silent mode, she would not speak.

.....I know.

.....Both machine crystal and I know who lies ahead of this division.

If you want to know, chase me. Now then, Sheltis, please chase me. That will be the beginning of everything.

11

We're talking about those Lords of Unusual Books. It should be simple for them to sense which path I have chosen and get there ahead of time.

That's why——

"You're there, aren't you."
Ahead of the corridor he was running down at full speed, he could see the exit shining brilliantly.
Part 7
The lighting shined blue.
In addition to the ceiling made in the image of a blue sky, there were idols, impressions and carvings treated with precious metals like brass and silver. There were even antiques like a pipe organ.
"It's a chapel."
"A giant hall, huh. To think there's a place like this underground."
The Number Nine
had his eyes stolen away by the gaudy scene and stood still for a moment. "But you knowit's kinda, you know."

He scratched his head through the hat.

"So the one who invited me was you, excessively glamorous red-haired miss?" "Oh. So you've finally decided to speak?"

Directly in front with the idols, bewitching lips curved up into a thin smile. She was sitting calmly upon the pedestal which was raised one level above the floor. She appeared to be in her mid-twenties. She had a voluptuous bust and a waist so thin it looked like it would snap which swelled out again to form her hipline — the one-piece she wore looked like it was cut straight from a mould of her and brought out her bewitching figure to an excessive degree.

"By the way, ain't where you're sitting for those religious scriptures?"

She stared fixedly at the spot she'd chosen to sit.

"I don't have any interest in these things, you see. It just caught my fancy because the design looks refined."

Chapun. The red wine in the glass the woman held jumped.

"I like alcohol and men. But I don't care for the weak ones. I like them strong." Heehee — she placed a finger to her bewitching lips and smiled sweetly while wriggling around.

That devilish beauty lined up together with one other feature, her long hair. It was a red devoid of any discoloration. The very wavy crimson hair made one think of a fire burning paired against her white skin.

"So then, have you had enough looking around? One of the executives of the secret military organization, 'Heaven's Wheel', Huick and his subordinate, Kurosan."

"Unfortunately, that's only getting started."

.....Oh boy, our information's totally leaking here.

He hid his expression with the hat worn low over his eyes and sighed slightly.

"How about we go about it together? I'd gladly welcome a beauty like you."

"My, how kind. But.....it seems I've strayed from my goal a little."

"I wanted to shock you more. A member of 'Heaven's Wheel' coming here alone is a confidential affair and investigating it was a lot of work, you know?" What a pity — she shrugged her shoulders exaggeratedly as if to say that.

"There are two basic patterns to when people get shaken up. They either stay

[&]quot;Oh, is that so?"

[&]quot;Hm?"

quiet to prevent getting swept up in the confusion or they suddenly get really talkative to cover up that they're shaken.However, you did neither. Even though this is enemy territory and you have no idea who I am while I know exactly who you are, you're even calmer on the contrary. You're quite the experienced one, aren't you?"

"So you're saying I'm one of those strong men you like."

".....Yes. That's exactly it."

The instant she let a full smile spread across her face — the wine's surface burst into high-rising flames with a plip.

"That's why I will be your opponent. I just happened to be bored."

Leaving the flaming wine glass atop the pedestal, she jumped down.

"Sacrement executive of the 'True Scarlet'

Number two of the Lords of Unusual Books, 'Scarlet' Natraja.....shall we start our fun?"

Part 7

.....The start.

The start was an omen that couldn't even be called instinct. It had been felt since stepping in the base.....no, it had been since stepping on this floating archipelago .

Somebody absurd is here.

Somebody absurdly powerful is here on this floating archipelago .

That premonition was swelling with every second and every minute, and finally became a conviction after coming here.

Left, middle and right.

Within the corridor that forked into three paths. Each of them had a bizarre sensation about it. And he had chosen this middle path out of all of them because of this presence seeping out.

—The air of intimidation was anomalous to the point of freezing one's spine.

A baby wouldn't feel it. Not even a child, adult or Cadet Guard of the Tower would realize it.

But for a Regular Guard.....they would lose the nerve to fight and even an Elite Guard would have the notion of running come to the forefront. But what about himself?

"......I'm shaking, huh."

It might have been tension or fear, or possibly excitement. Rebuking himself for having his arm shake while wielding his greatsword, Leon continued down the dark passageway.

And finally, he came to see light.

Within that, the figure of a man with golden hair was the first to come into view.

.....That's the man.

In the face of the pressure which rose explosively, his cheeks were dripping sweat even just by walking closer.

"Blue and Green gave me a report. They said it was an intruder."

A low sound echoed from within the light.

.....From my opponent?

Unexpectedly, the one who spoke was the man in the light.

"—is what I would say normally. I can't make such small talk. After all, this is the Sennenshi Leon Nestorius Ova himself."

11													ı	ı
	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		

He wasn't really surprised that his identity had been discovered. Putting aside Huick from the Governmental Sector and Sheltis, he was the partner of a Priestess. His face and name were known across the floating continent and if his face had been described by those twins, Blue and Green, it would be a given for his identity to be found out.

"The greatsword user of the floating continentI see. Although we have not met, I have heard that you possess skill which does that name justice. Splendid, that is all the more reason——"

He passed through the corridor and ring of light in response to the voice.

A battle of stone mats.

In the center stood a greatsword user with lustrous blond hair.

"Number one of the Lords of Unusual Books, 'Silver' Armadel. I shall face you." The light in his eyes made one think of a sharp blade.

His tall body that would be prominent even at a distance was honed like steel and his muscled, manly build was visible even over the gray coat he wore. He looked more mature than his age with gallant, handsome features.

The greatsword user's looks would make any woman turn back to look at him.

Leon knew this man better than anybody else.
Their faces and physiques were completely the same.
The only difference was that Leon had silver hair and this man had blond.
•••••
No, way?
He tried to suppress his shock but couldn't. That was also another first for him.
Yes. Looking almost exactly like himself—
"Armadel?"
Was his brother who should be dead.

Part 8

"

A light and sweet citrus scent.

A sweetness like that of just the right amount of powdered sugar and a pleasant sourness.....lemon pie? He had a memory of Ymy baking one long ago. She failed the first time and had her face painted black, but because of the frustration, she practiced making it many times over and it became her specialty cake in the end.

.....It smells like that time.

.....But why am I remembering that now?

"You're totally daydreaming."

"|"

With those words, Sheltis instantly prepared the swords in his hands.

.....That's right.

.....The moment he entered the room, he'd been hit by a strange nostalgia. It might have been hypnosis or illusions. His consciousness had been blown away by something unknown.

"Your eyes were gazing into thin air. Did you perhaps remember something nostalgic?"

A very tiny study.

In the room which was obviously small in comparison to the gigantic corridor, a black shadow stood at the window.

.....It's a strange room.

There's a window despite this being underground and there's an endless grassland beyond the window.

"But it's also enjoyable watching you like that. I've seen something unexpected about you."

The young man with a black hat worn low over his eyes smiled with a chuckle. A pitch black suit and pitch black boots, with a pitch black hat. Amongst the colors dominated by black, the pale blond hair swaying beneath the hat was the only thing eye-catching.

```
"lgun-l....."
```

He held up the sword in his right hand and thrust it forward. He closed in yet one more step to the Lord of Unusual Books who wouldn't lose his calm smile no matter what.

"I'm glad."

As if he wasn't even paying attention to the hostility aimed at him, the all-black Lord of Unusual Books put a hand to his chest and respectfully bowed.

"Then I shall introduce myself once more. I am the Lords of Unusual Books assistant, Igun-I."

".....Assistant?"

"An apprentice. I only joined this organization a year ago so I haven't been assigned a proper rank yet. At any rate, the Lords of Unusual Books are set to six people so unless the 'top' thins out, there won't be a rank or anything. Are you surprised?"

.....This man is an assistant.

A man entrusted with infiltrating into the Governmental Sector and contacting Mikuva's Crimson Eye is an assistant?

"But I'm actually enjoying my current circumstances. 'The seventh that should

[&]quot;Yes."

[&]quot;I didn't come for that kind of conversation."

[&]quot;----?"

[&]quot;You remembered my name."

not be'. The 'Blank' with no assigned rank — no other rank would suit me better."

The Lord of Unusual Books traced his finger along the window frame.

The two keys which form the world. That is to say the Seventh Heaven Rhythm and Seventh True Rhythm ."

"!?"

"That's a nice reaction. Unease and suspicion, nervousness and vigor are mixed into that expression..... It's a nice expression."

"Why do you—"

Putting aside the Seventh Heaven Rhythm, one of the Lords of Unusual Books who has no connection to

Tenketsu Palace

shouldn't know about the Seventh True Rhythm .

"About me, about your mateki, about the Seventh True Rhythm . You have too many questions so you don't know where to start. That's what it appears to be — but that's fine."

Igun-I spread his hands and seemed to be looking up to the sky as he continued. "I shall tell you everything. About the truth you wish for and that which you don't, everything in its entirety. That's why I'm here."

"...."

"Oh? Why are you staying silent?"

Sheltis had deliberately not relaxed himself in front of the Lord of Unusual Books telling him this as if singing.

"......I have no interest in your identity. But for now, I need to hear your goal at the least."

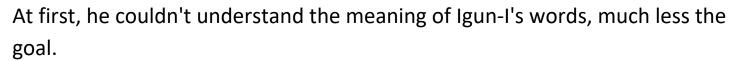
He needed to learn what his goal was in joining the third organization a year ago.

Why is he so fixated on me and why is he willing to come out about that information on his own?

"Do you like poisonous strawberries?"

[&]quot;Hey, Sheltis, don't you agree?"

[&]quot;The seventh tone color arrives before twilight.



[&]quot;.....Poisonous?"

Now what would you do?"

"

I can't read the intentions of this man before me.

.....I can't believe he's asking me for my response to such an unreasonable question.

"Is that so? Then on the contrary, let's give the answer to your first question.

My goal is to get your 'answer' to the question from just now. Your will, your decision. The proof that your love for me alone exists and will answer."

Sway. Right after hazes appeared at Igun-I's hands, two hook-like swords were gripped in both.

Swords.....and a dual wielder like me.

"Yes, let's practice for your sake. For this day which is to come. Now then—" "I am Blank.

The colorless color, the color of a forgotten past gone by.

So Sheltis, dye me in your color.

More dearly than red.

More distinct than blue.

More magnificent than green.

More elegant than yellow.

Purer than white.

I wish.....for you to dye me in the brilliance of the night's twilight.

[&]quot;Let's split a strawberry cake between you and Ymy. Amongst the many strawberries is a single one with deadly poison that will kill you if you eat it. You know where the poisonous strawberry is but Ymy doesn't even know it exists.

[&]quot;......I'd just get rid of the poisonous strawberry."

[&]quot;That's no good. The poisonous strawberry must also be eaten in this case."

[&]quot;.....What..... That's stupid."

[&]quot;Would you eat the poisonous strawberry first yourself before Ymy does? Or would you split it half and half and both die?"

[&]quot;There's no way......I could answer that!"

So I can be at your side, so you can't forget me.

In return, I will dye you in my blank color.

.....Even if it runs counter to the law of the world.

.....This is how much I think of you. That's why.

I shall carve you full of wounds so you can't forget me this time."

Part 9

She laid back on the pilot seat which was reclined to the limit.

Occasionally turning over during her afternoon nap atop the impromptu bed, and occasionally turning over again. That had repeated itself how many times now.

"Hmm..... Everyone's sure taking their time. Even though they said they'd be back quickly."

She spread her hands wide and stretched her stiff shoulders. Using the reactionary force from that, Eyriey lifted her upper body up.

—It's already been three hours.

After letting Sheltis and crew off on another island, she'd let Horn off on this island and gone on standby. It had already been three hours since then.

However, the problem was that she couldn't judge whether three hours was a long time or a short time in this situation.

".....They didn't give me a time limit or anything, after all."

She didn't hear it from Sheltis but it seemed that they were breaking into some organization's base somewhere on the floating archipelago this time. Thanks to the conversation that Shasa had transmitted with telepathy on the Tower's 269th floor, she had a rough grasp of what was going on.

But.....how long does an infiltration take?

She couldn't even come up with an appropriate estimate as a non-Guard.

Would it take a whole day or just an hour?

.....It's already past three in the evening.

"No, no, wait a second, hold up. They said they'd be back before tonight.

.....From here to

Tenketsu Palace

would be about five hours, wouldn't it? So it wouldn't be odd if everybody came back right now, right?"

Even so, nobody had come. Moreover, even though they should have communicators, nobody had sent in a report to now.

What was assured were the words Horn left behind when she went.

"If you don't receive contact from any of us—"

"Return to

Tenketsu Palace

with just the two of you. There's no need to wait for us."

".....I have a bad feeling."

There was the fact that she wasn't informed about the details but what she didn't like more was how casually she'd said "There's no need to wait for us".

This doesn't sit well with me.

Shasa had been the same when she'd first met her as well, but it felt like there were a lot of people that were self-sacrificing or didn't wanted to be minded.

"That's..... That's not how friends are."

Especially now, they were in the floating archipelago

far from the floating continent. If she were to leave on her own, that would mean leaving everybody stuck on this island.

"Alright, I've decided! I'll stick here to the bitter end! With that in mind, it's time to eat snacks in preparation for this protracted battle! Come on, Yuto, you should also eat............ Huh?"

She had thought it was strangely quiet but the copilot seat next to her was completely empty.

"Yuto..... Huh, Yuto? Oiii, if you want to play hide-and-seek, say that to start with—"

Her shoulder was patted from behind the pilot chair.

"Wha?"

"Coming to some conclusion on your own and shouting by yourself, you seem to be having fun."

Brushing aside the jet black hair over her ear, the woman smiled. I know her — she had noble and maturity beyond her years, as well as a voluptuous body that couldn't be hidden by her pitch black vestment.

"Hm, mm?Aren't you Tsali-san?"

She was an acquaintance of both Shasa and Yuto. They'd only met once at The Two Swans but she striking enough to at least have her name stick.

"Why are you on this ship? would make this go fast. I'm your guard."

"Guard?"

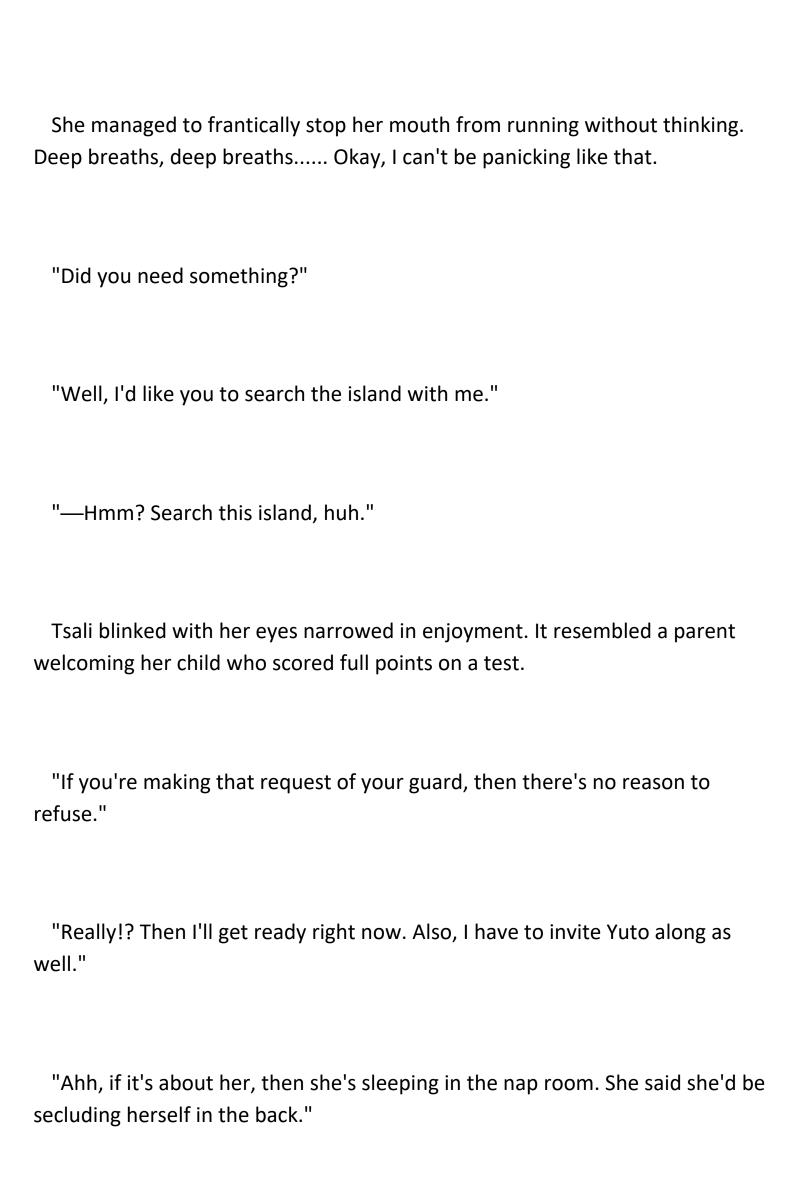
Being told that, the first thing that came to mind was Shasa's face.

You need not worry about your safety. I will have a trustworthy partner accompany you.

"So please take Yuto along with you, Eyriey."

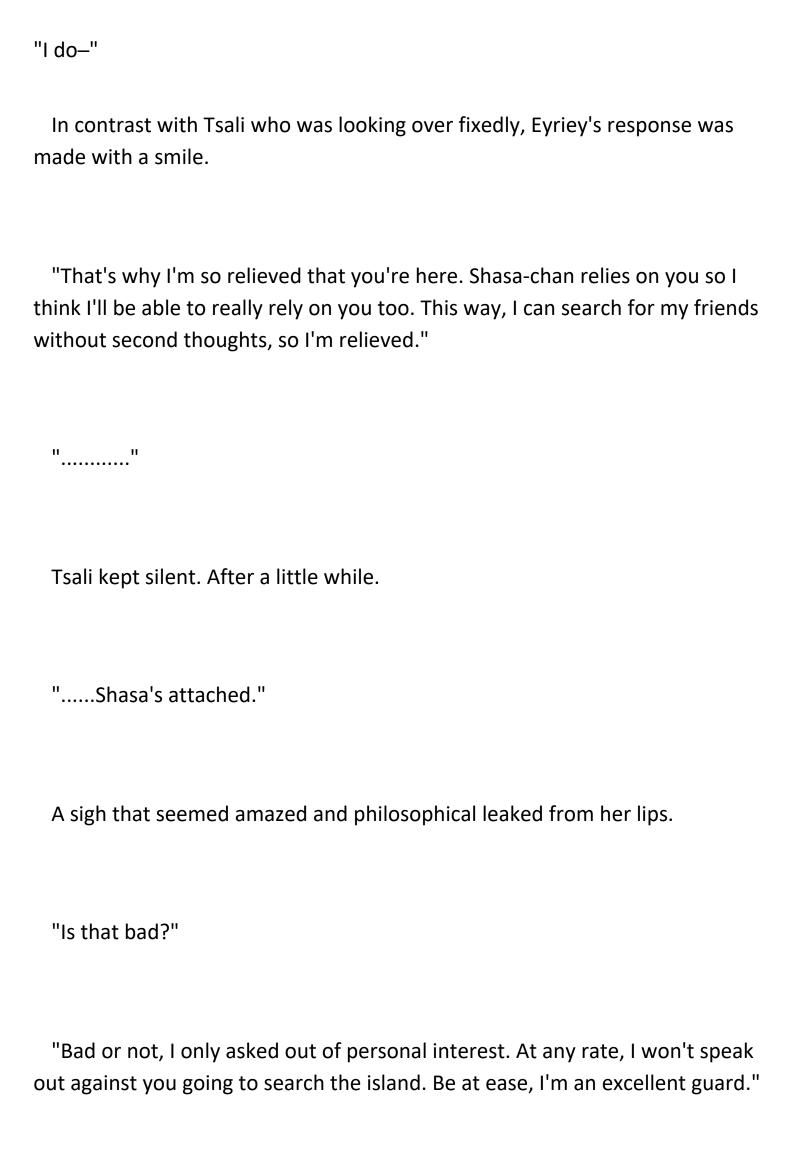


guard will always be by my side By my side?"
"Is something the matter, my protege?"
Tsali leaned over the back of the pilot seat and looked down at her. Eyriey looked up fixedly at her eyes from her position in the pilot seat.
"Tsali-san, are you amazing?"
"I'm amazing and strong. To the point that Shasa asked me ' Are you really human? ' with shock."
"Guarding means you'll protect me no matter where I am?"
"Of course."
"Then—"
Whoa, whoa, that was close, too close.









"Ohhh!? Alright, if that's settled, then let's go!"
Eyriey faced her assenting guard and pointed out the window, then ran to the passenger room exit.
Behind her—
"Haa, as expected, I can't beat Eyri-nee. She really treasures her friends. What a dazzling person."
"That's why Yuto loves Eyri-nee."
That faint sigh went unnoticed.

Chapter 4 - Now We Meet

Part 1

The smell of dirt and grass. The sound of insects, cries of birds and the rustling of leaves produced by the wind sweeping over the floating archipelago Lagoon.
—There's no real difference from patrolling the Biotope.
In the shade of a large tree, Horn looked down at the electronic display of her watch.
"Thirty minutes have passed. No scheduled reports from the main unit."
She muttered in a mechanical tone and stood up from the bushes around the many trees. She repositioned her rifle leaning against her shoulder and bitterly bit down on her lip.
—Something happened. No, something else happened in addition.

She had received a report from Leon thirty minutes ago that they were infiltrating the base. The regular scheduled reports had stopped immediately after that. Even if it was called a report though, it was just pressing a button on the communicator to

'confirm you're alive'.

That's not coming.

And it wasn't just Leon, there was no signal from Sheltis or the Number Nine <Huick> of the Governmental Sector. But even hypothetically, could a unit containing a Sennenshi and executive of the Governmental Sector be wiped out this quickly?

—What comes to mind is that they're in the midst of responding to an assault.

"They were either all separated or surrounded......"

At any rate, there was no way anything good was happening.

Another source of worry was that there were no instructions from the Priestesses. The one watching over them via clairvoyance was Syun-rei so if anything happened to Leon, she would have reported it straight away.

That hasn't happened. So the situation isn't bad?
The two possibilities were contrasting. Which one is true? Which one should I trust in as I move?
"——It is unavoidable."
She started moving again after having come to a stop.
Horn had come to the conclusion that she had to link up with the main unit. If the circumstances were good, then it would just end at her having made a meaningless trip. However, if something happened at the enemy base, her not going to support them could be a fatal mistake.
Unease was still within her heart but even then she would believe in her choice and head towards the base that Leon reported—
II II
Immediately afterwards, the abnormality that surfaced on her thigh made her doubt her eyes.

"Blood?"
The section of her camouflaged suit at her thigh was cleanly severed and was being dyed red with the spreading blood. It wasn't from a tree branch or scraping against a rock. It was a clean cut like that of a sharp blade.
When was I wounded?
Was it just now or was I already wounded when I was walking around the floating archipelago <lagoon>?</lagoon>
No. This is not a wound from the floating archipelago <lagoon>'s environment. It is obviously man-made. Also, if I was wounded like this on the way, there's no way I wouldn't notice.</lagoon>
So it was just now?
IIII
Without removing her blinder, she maintained a watch over the future shown by her
'Celestial Map Drawing'
. Within the future that was only a few moments ahead, if she were to

perceive the slightest thing out of place, she should be able to react at least

minimally.
Nothing stood out in the view of Celestial Map Drawing. Large trees surrounded her and she was right next to the thickets. This floating archipelago <lagoon> was devoid of any dangerous lifeforms so it could be said there was not a single thing to watch out for. Nothing was out of place in the surroundings</lagoon>
—Click.
—Shiver.
The tiny mechanical sound Horn heard made her jump directly to the side in an instant. Though nothing stood out in her vision, she trusted her instinct and kicked at the ground.
"!?"
She felt
'something'
pass near her shoulder. At the same time, the camouflaged cloth there was

torn up, and blood shot out from beneath it. Whatever passed by kept going

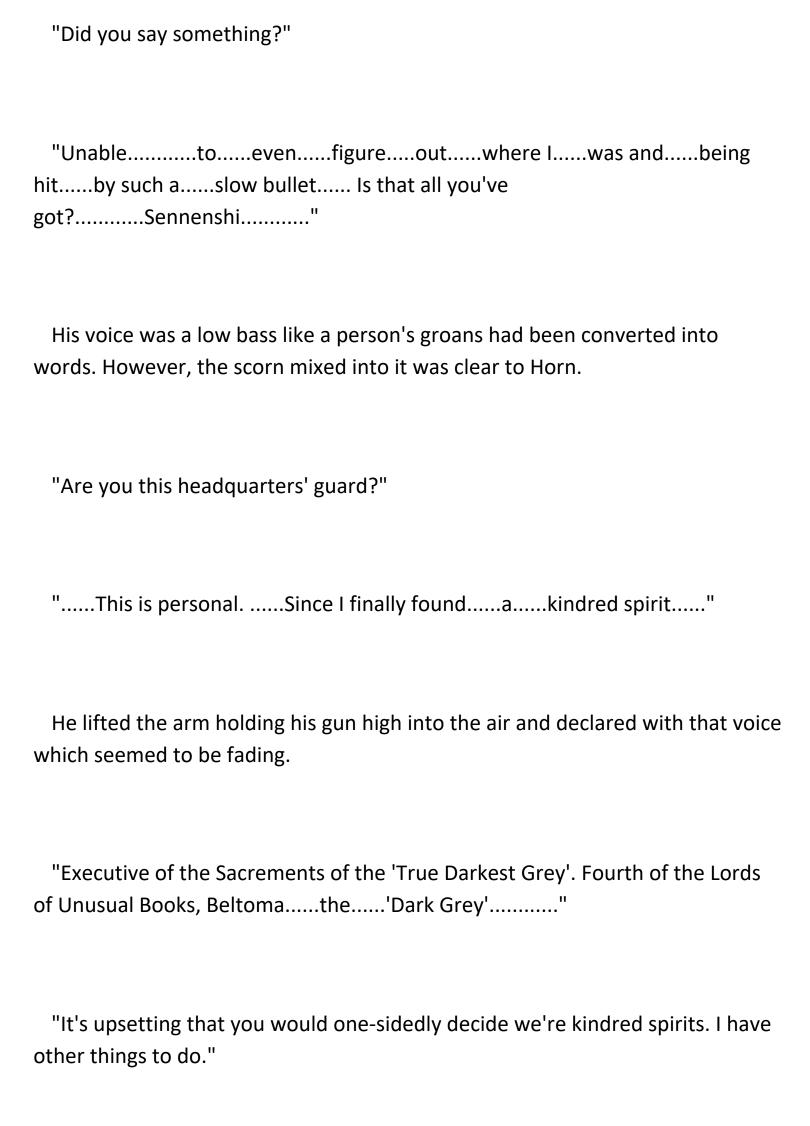
and pierced through a tree's trunk behind her, leaving behind a hole like a

needle.

"A sniper at close range!"
She threw aside her rifle and drew a machine pistol with her right hand, then she tumbled to the ground and moved deeper into the bushes.
—I could confirm neither the round nor the sniper but there's no doubt.
—It was a snipe performed with an accurate understanding of my position.
Concealing herself within the shrubbery even more, she didn't stay in that location for even a second before dashing into the sea of trees. A split second later, the spot she was at was sniped.
"Do they want to have a shootout with me?"
She put aside figuring out why she couldn't see the bullet with Celestial Map Drawing. No matter what, finding the sniper's location took priority. Otherwise this one-sided defensive would continue.
Then.
Suddenly, the sniping came to a halt.

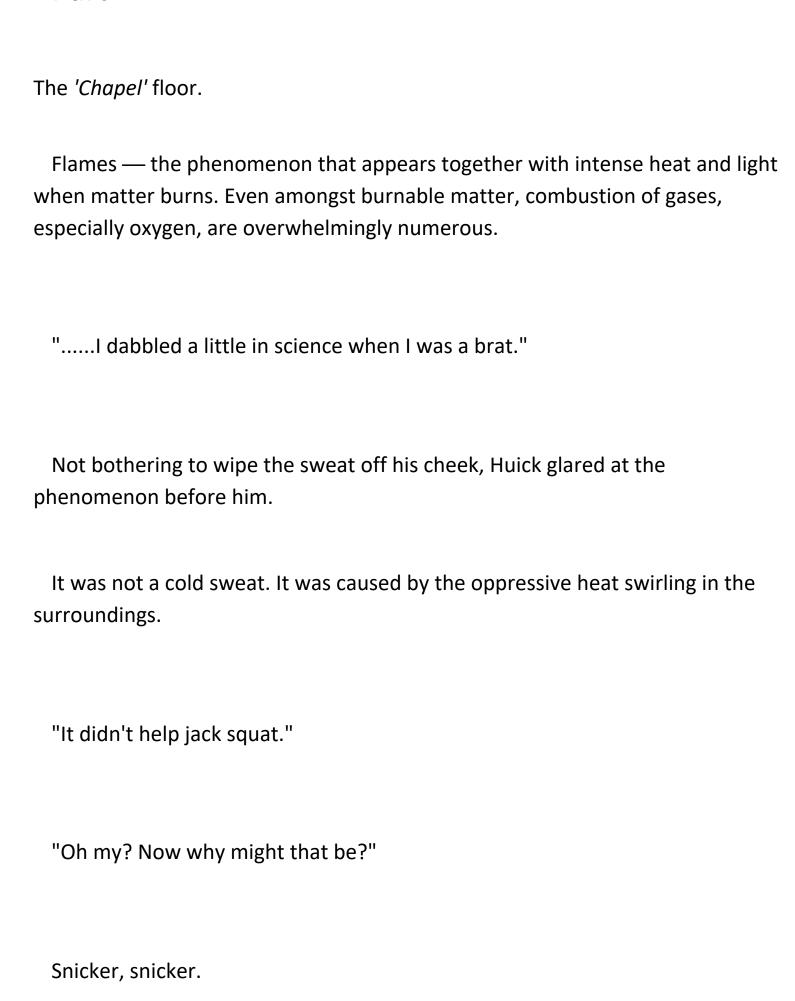
"I'm surprised you would just show yourself so easily."
A thin figure stood within a clearing in the sea of trees which was sparsely populated by flowers.
II II
A dead tree.
That was Horn's first impression upon seeing the man before her.
He was as tall as was standard for men but he was unusually thin. His muscles and fat were trimmed to the limit — no, they were trimmed beyond the limit. Standing upright in a camouflaged suit, he resembled the sea of trees around them.
"Or are you surrendering?"
II II

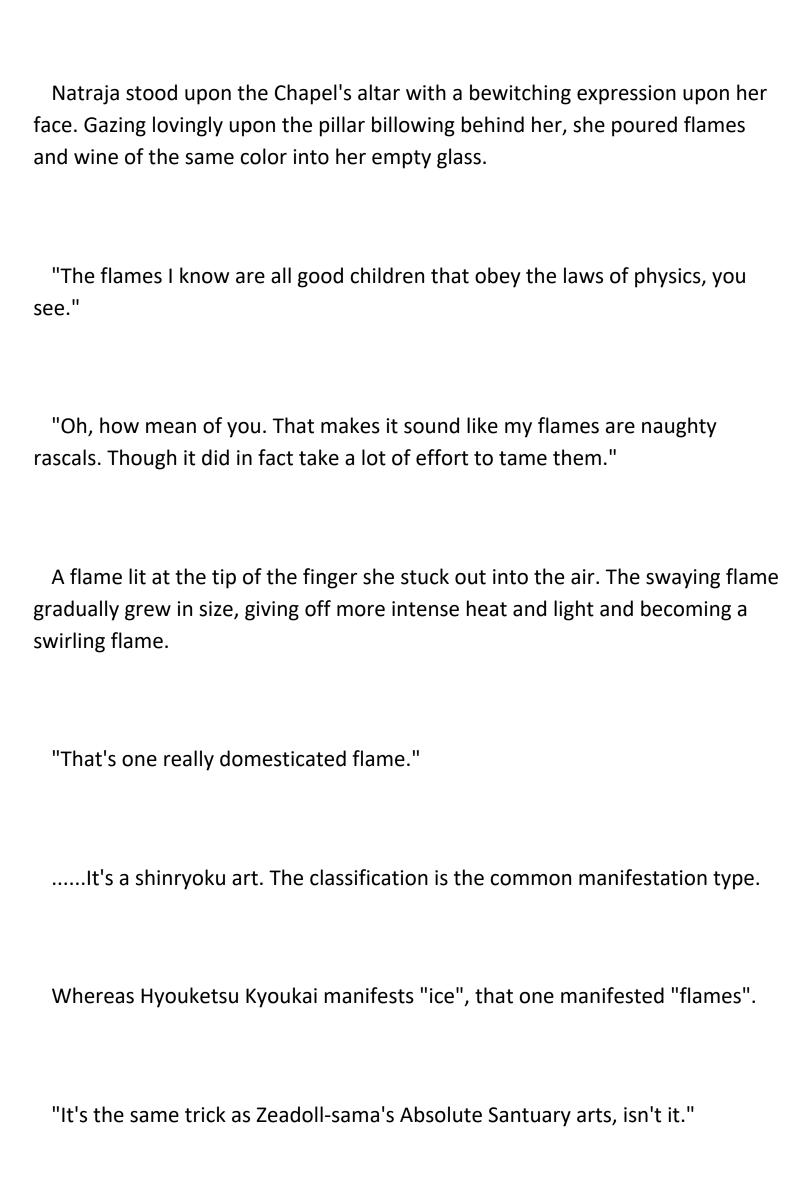
The man did not answer. As the camouflaged suit drew up over his head, neither his expression nor even his line of sight could be verified.
That was quite the magical-looking gun.
In the man's right hand was a rifle and in his left was a small automatic pistol. Both were white streaked with grey and various places such as the magazines and muzzle had protrusions.
That was quite the magical paint job on his gun.
In the man's right hand was a rifle and his in left was a small automatic pistol. Both of them where white with grey paint overtop and bumps in various places like the magazine and mouth. That design was reminiscent of nature and the bones of animals.
"So you're from the third organization. I'd heard about you guys but how delightful of you to aim at a woman from behind. Is that to show off your lack of confidence?"
"Is thatallyou've got?"

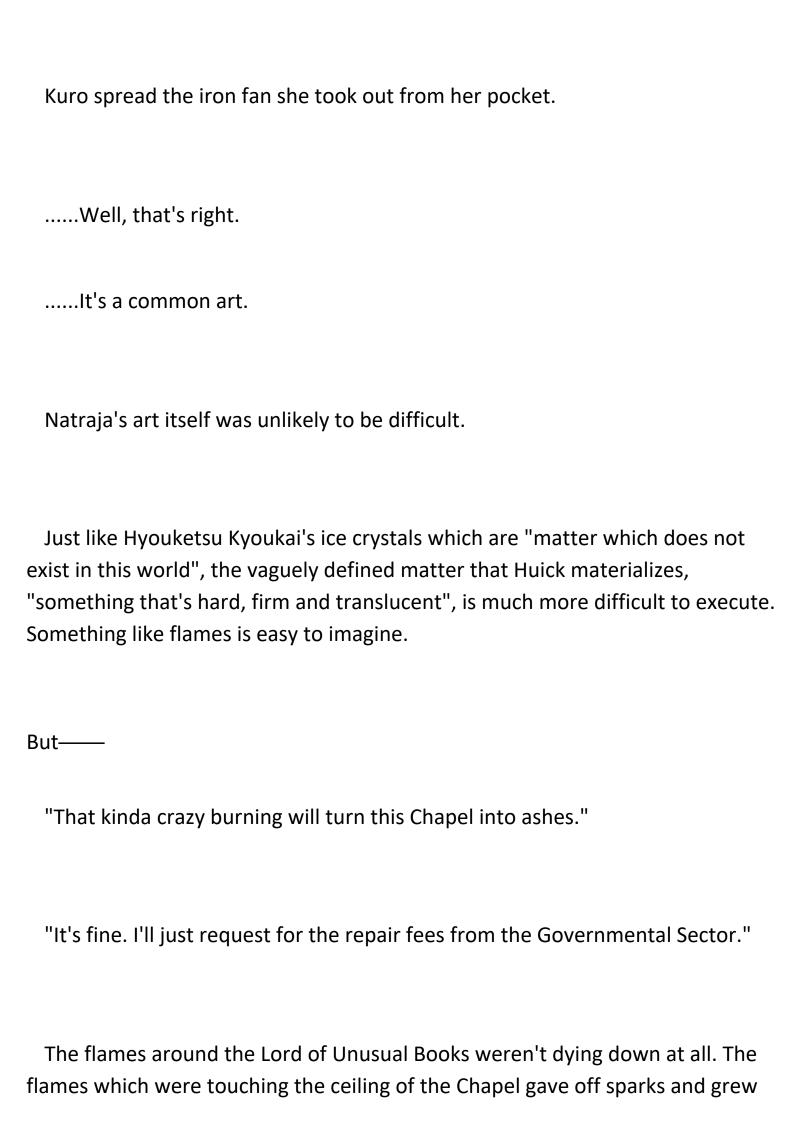


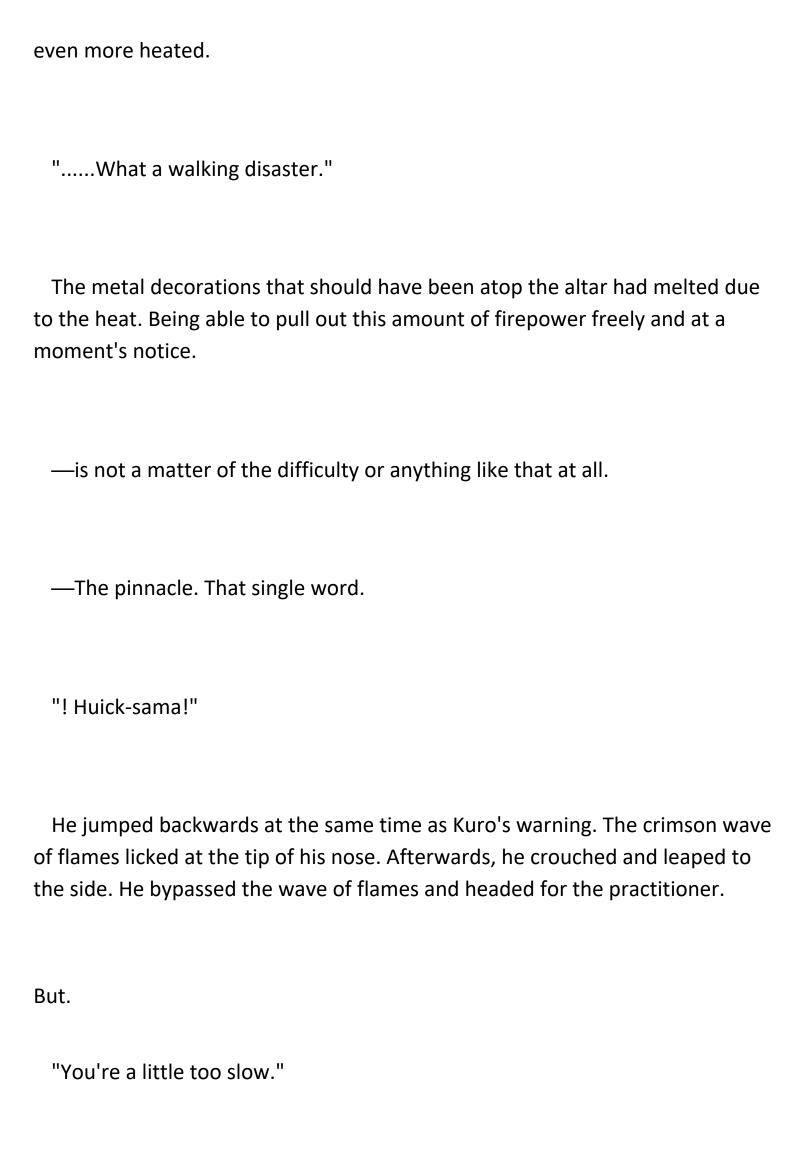
Horn put her hand to her blinder and tore it off forcefully.

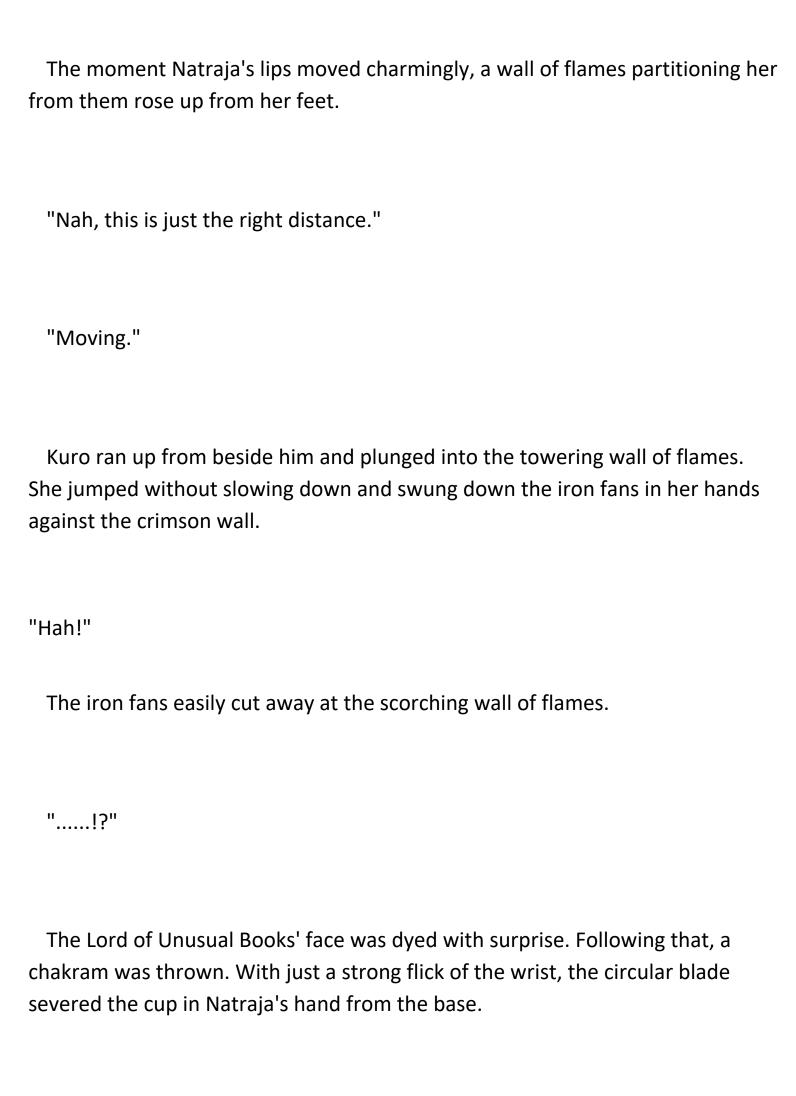
"I'm in a hurry so I'll only charge you for the clothing fee."

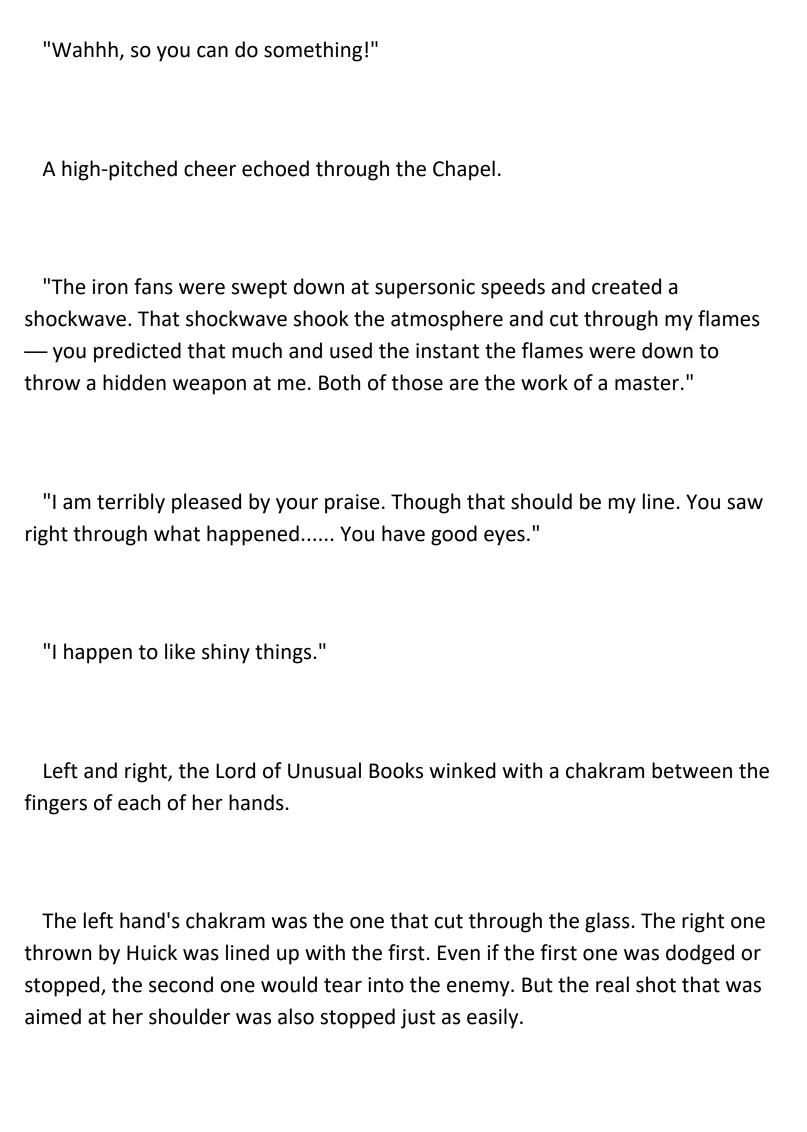


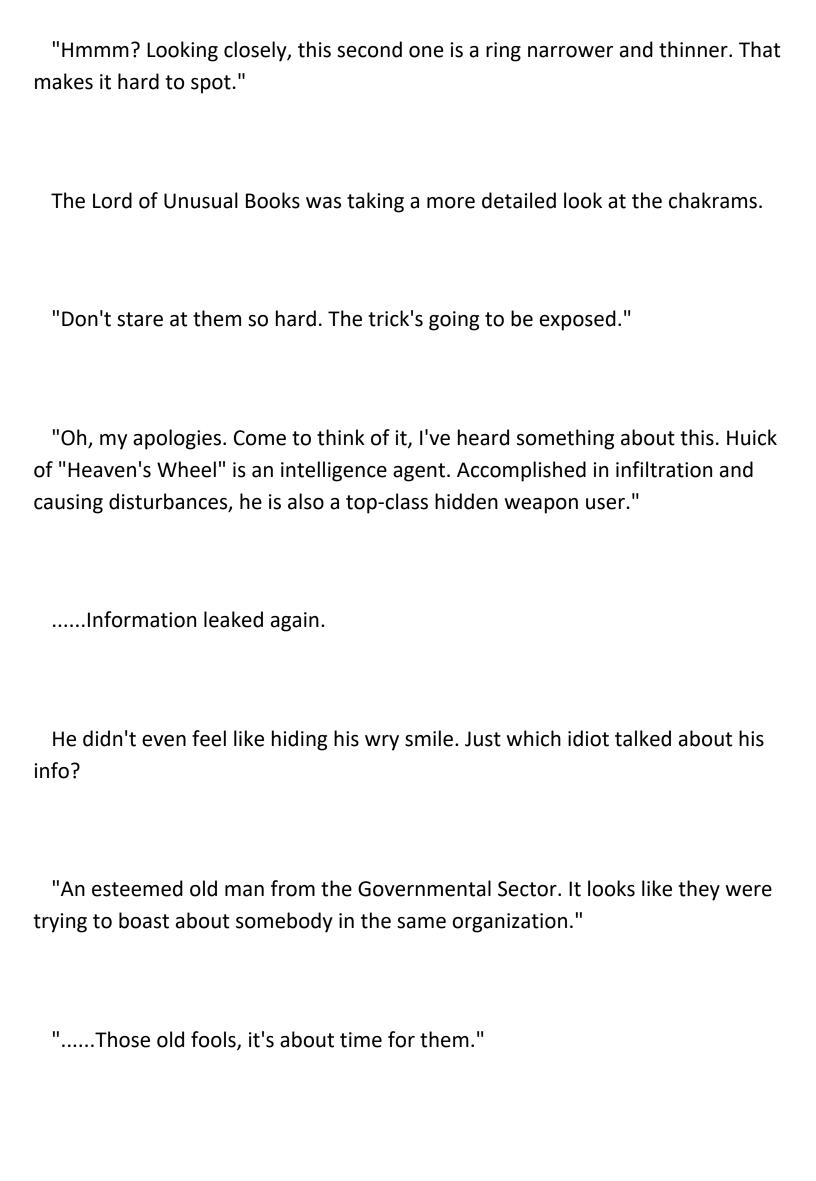


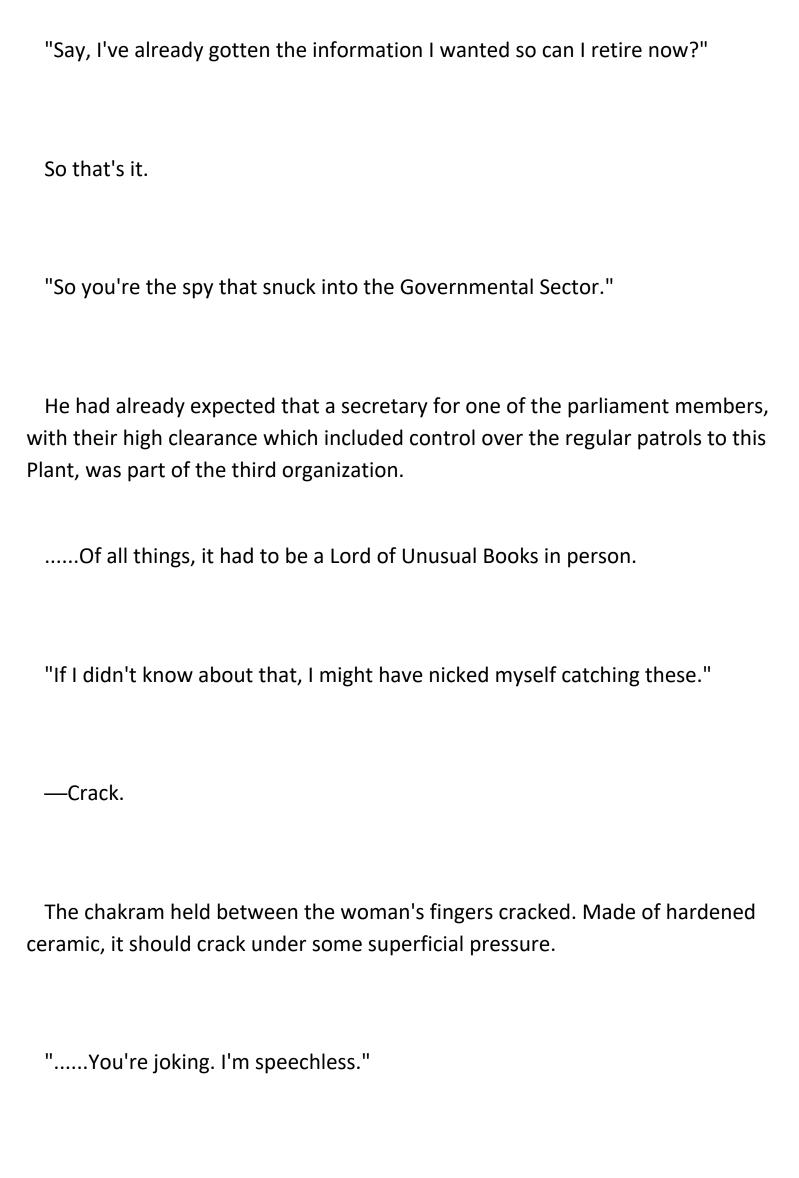












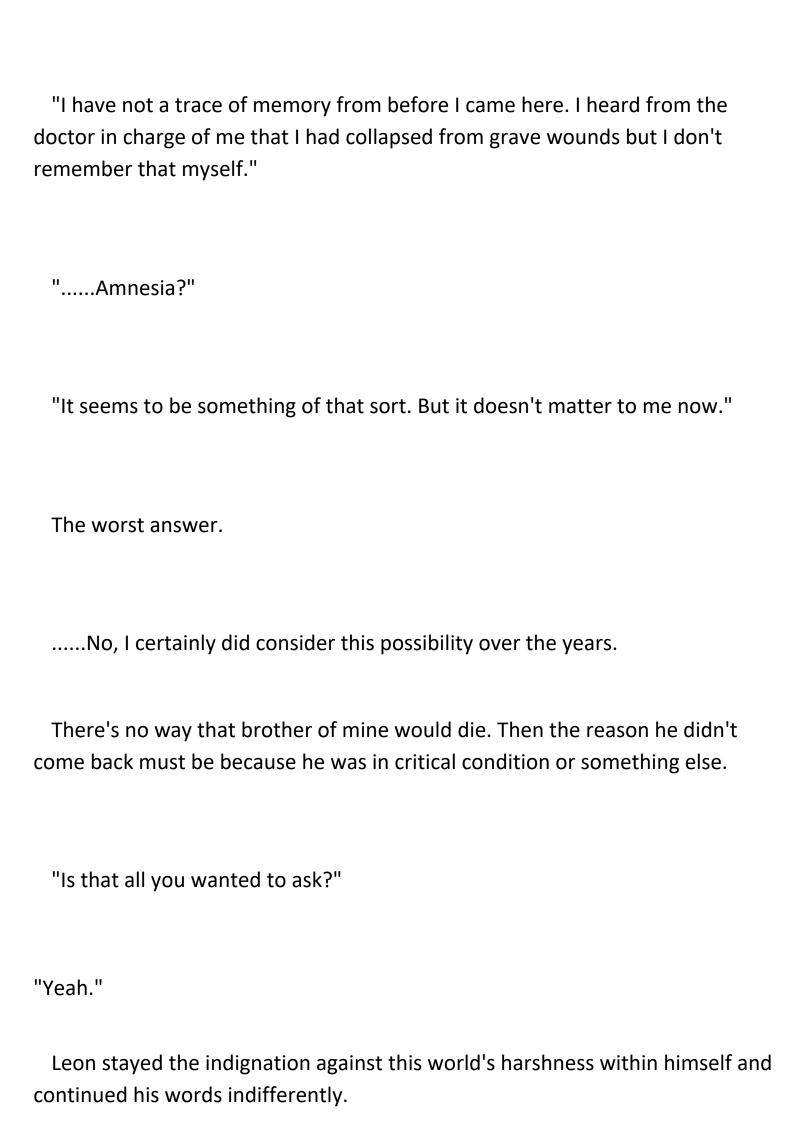
"Oh, but that's my life."
The woman ground the fractured chakram beneath her boot but never once took her eyes off them.
"The members of 'Heaven's Wheel' use an amount of weapons that match with their nicknamesSo, Huick the 'Ninth',
how many hidden weapons can you use at once?"
With a roar, Natraja's flames became even more fierce.
"Not enough, not enough. Not enough, not enough, not enough. This isn't enough at all. There's no meaning in my coming here. Allow me to show you just how fearsome the number two of the Lords of Unusual Books is——"
Crawling her fingers along her own nape, she let out a hot sigh.
A devilish charm and madness were reflected within her eyes.
"My flames will become much, much, much, much stronger. If you don't get serious, you might just turn into cinders?"

".....Do you recognize me?"

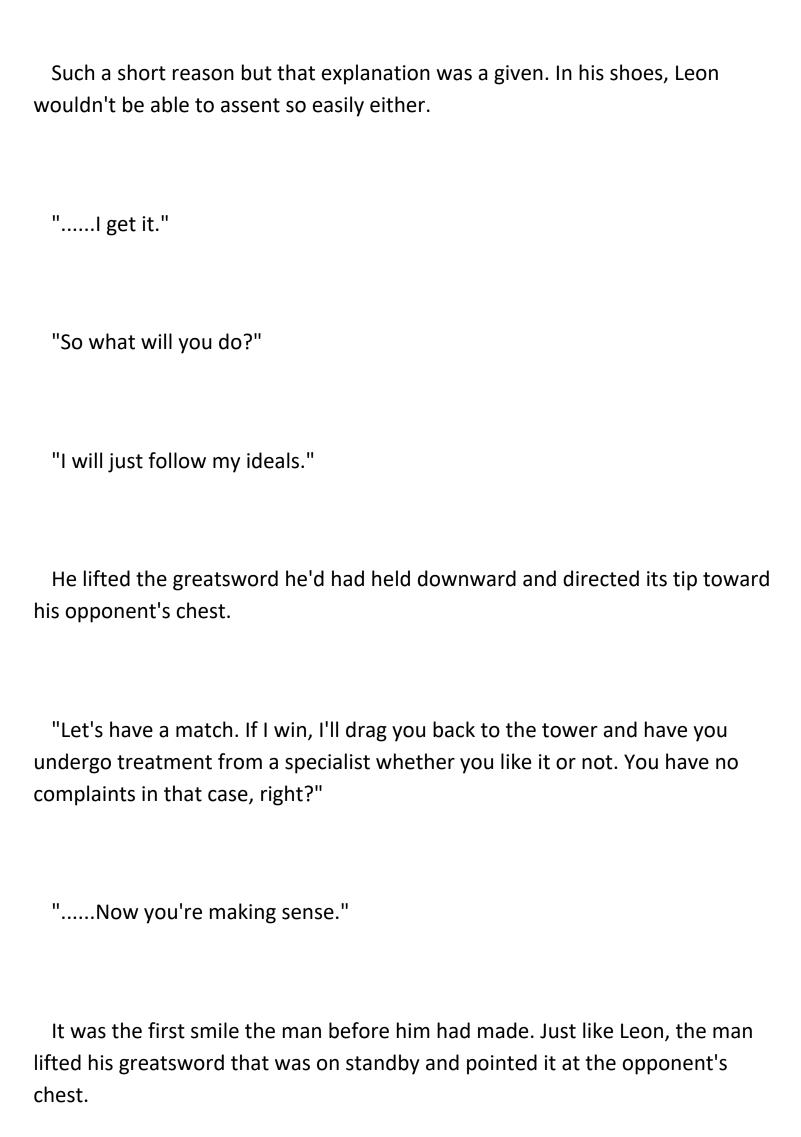
A coincidental resemblance.
There are people who resemble each other despite sharing neither bloodline nor environment. He had not a shred of intent of denying that.
However, this.
Can this be explained away with just that?
un
Just once, Leon cast a gaze of doubt upon the man before him.
This man resembled him not just in height and face, but also in bone structur and right down to the way his muscles connected. Even his name, Armadel, wa the same as Leon's brother'sCould such a thing be a coincidence?
"What is it?"

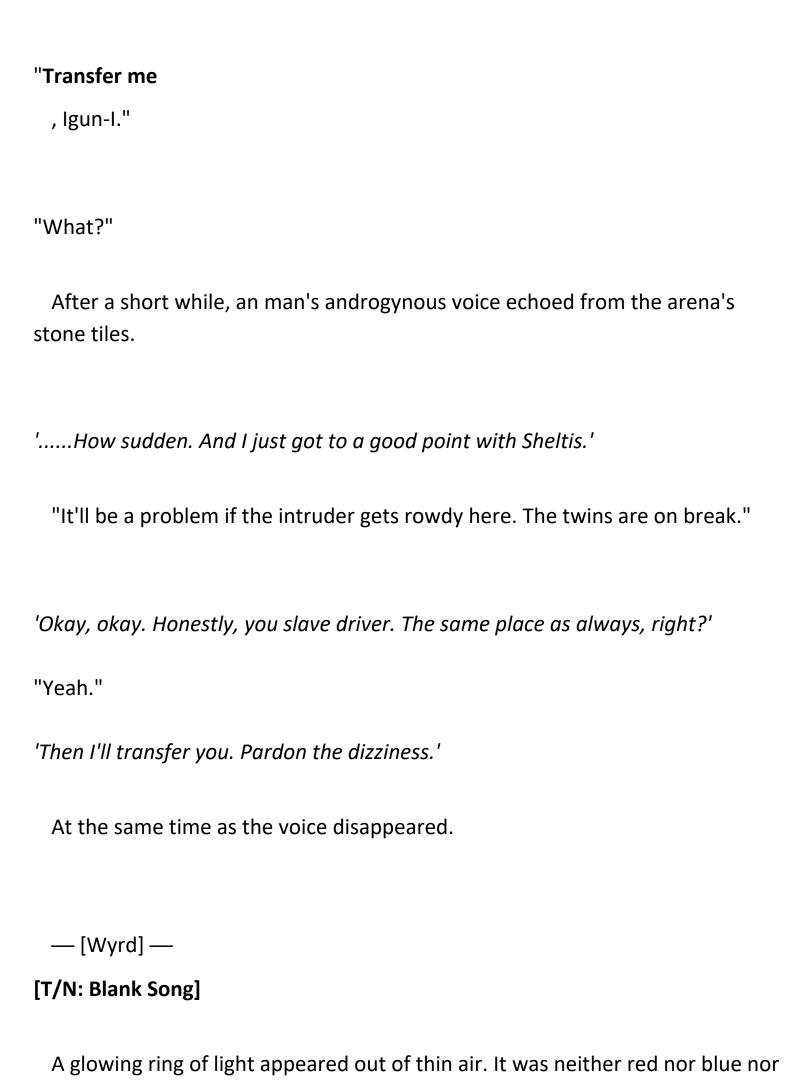


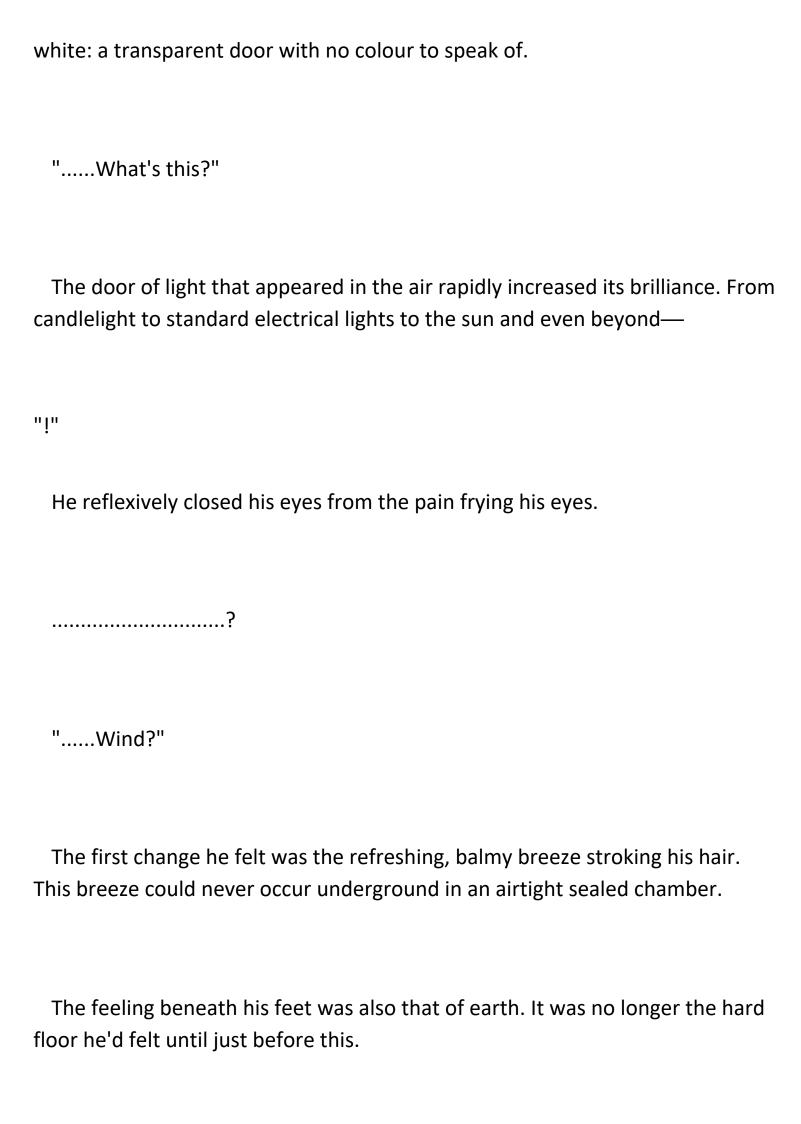




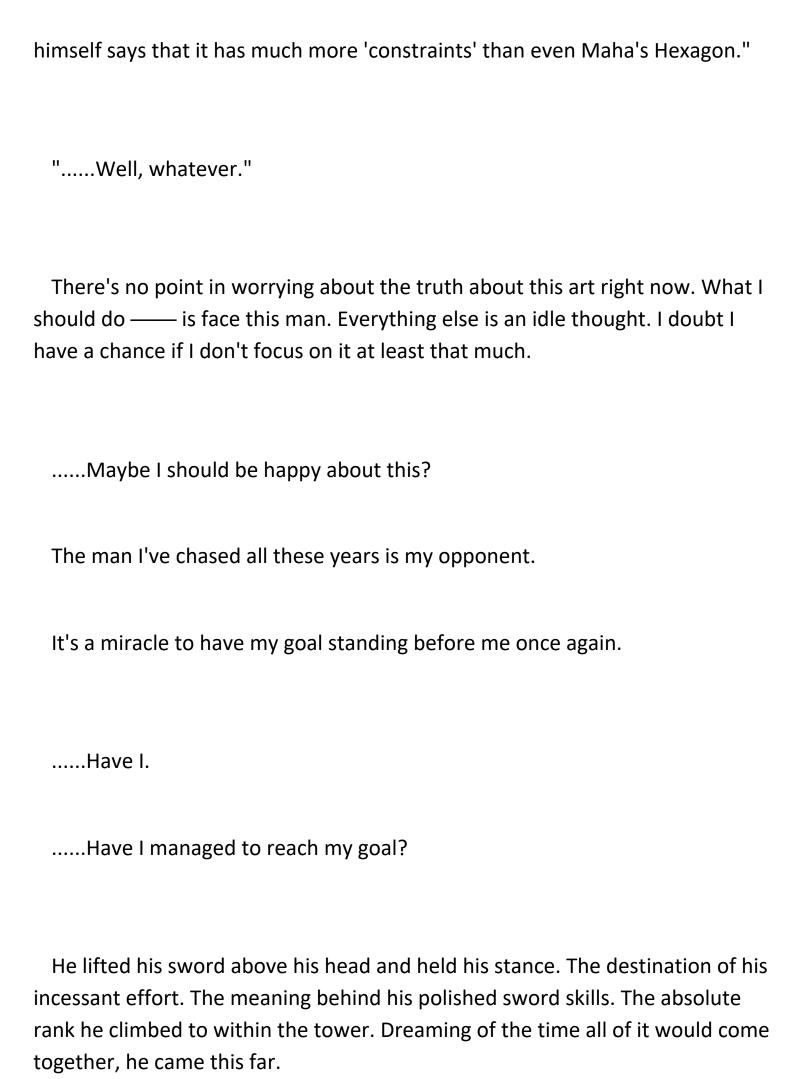
"I had an older brother. His name was also Armadel and he also used a greatsword. Just like youhe looked just like me."
II II
"I don't know if you really are himNo, that's a lie. Within my mind, I've already come to the conclusion that you're most likely him. However——"
He glared at the greatsword user head-on.
"I doubt that matters to you right now."
"Of course."
Armadel's response was quick.
"Even if you set me up as your older brother, it's just sudden and without proof from my point of view. There's no proof beyond 'resemblance'. It might even be a trap to turn an enemy into an ally."







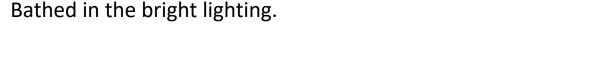




That's	why—
THAT 3	vviiy

"Let's do this."

Leon ran towards the man before him.



Repeatedly descending the endless emergency stairs in the tower. And ascending them.

.....Just how long have I been running?

"Haa.....!"

Ymy put her hands against the wall and leaned on them, forming an angle with her body as she repeatedly took deep breaths.

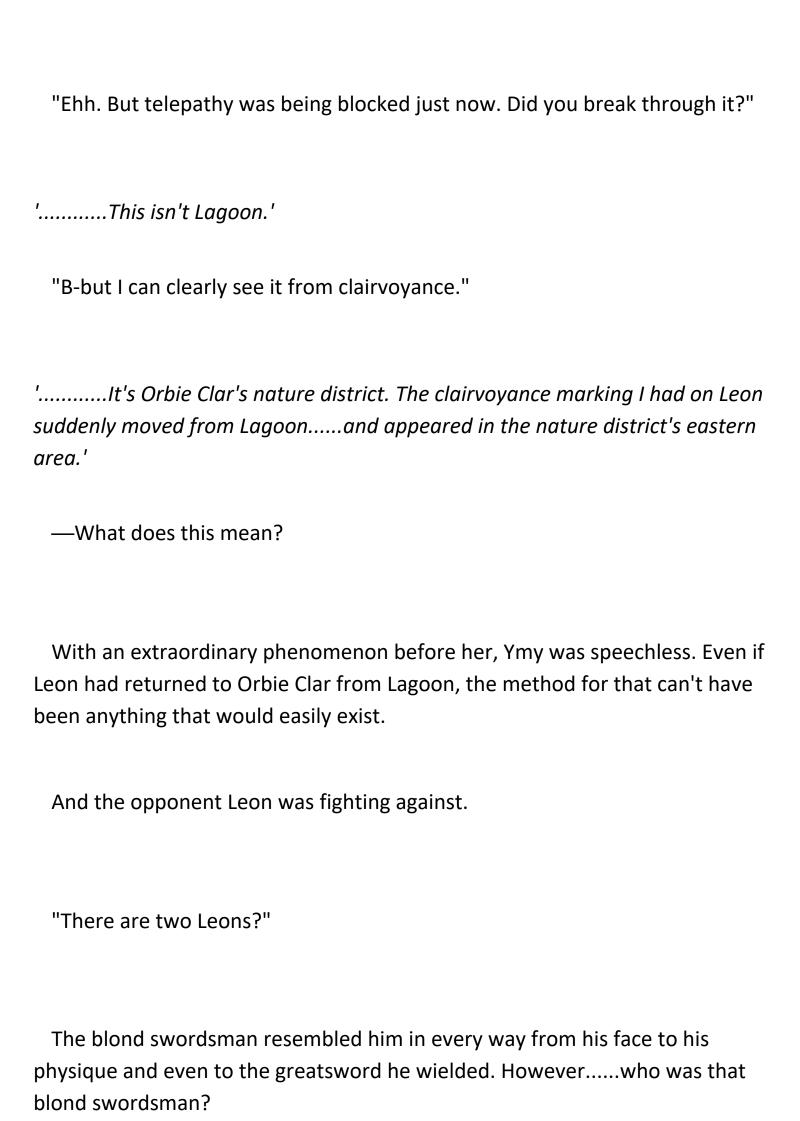
"Ishtar-san, where did you go at a time like this?"

Ishtar should have the communicator which connects to the detached unit. But she couldn't be found anywhere. Asking Meimel had only resulted in the repeated response of "You don't have to worry about her."

......Ishtar-san is in charge of staying in contact.

But this isn't working. Too much time has passed. I should head back to Syun-rei.
To reach floor 287 where Syun-rei is waiting, the Priestess-exclusive elevator is the fastest. She turned her quivering feet towards the exclusive elevator which should be in the northern part of every floor—
'Leon!?'
Syun-rei's voice filled with surprise suddenly came in through telepathy.
'I found Leon!'
"Eh?"
Before Ymy could process Syun-rei's words, images from Syun-rei's clairvoyance were transferred.
—A ravine?
Against a backdrop of a waterfall kicking up a spray of water, two greatsword users were engaged in a back-and-forth battle. One of them — the silver-haired

swordsman in a white coat was certainly the Leon Ymy knew.

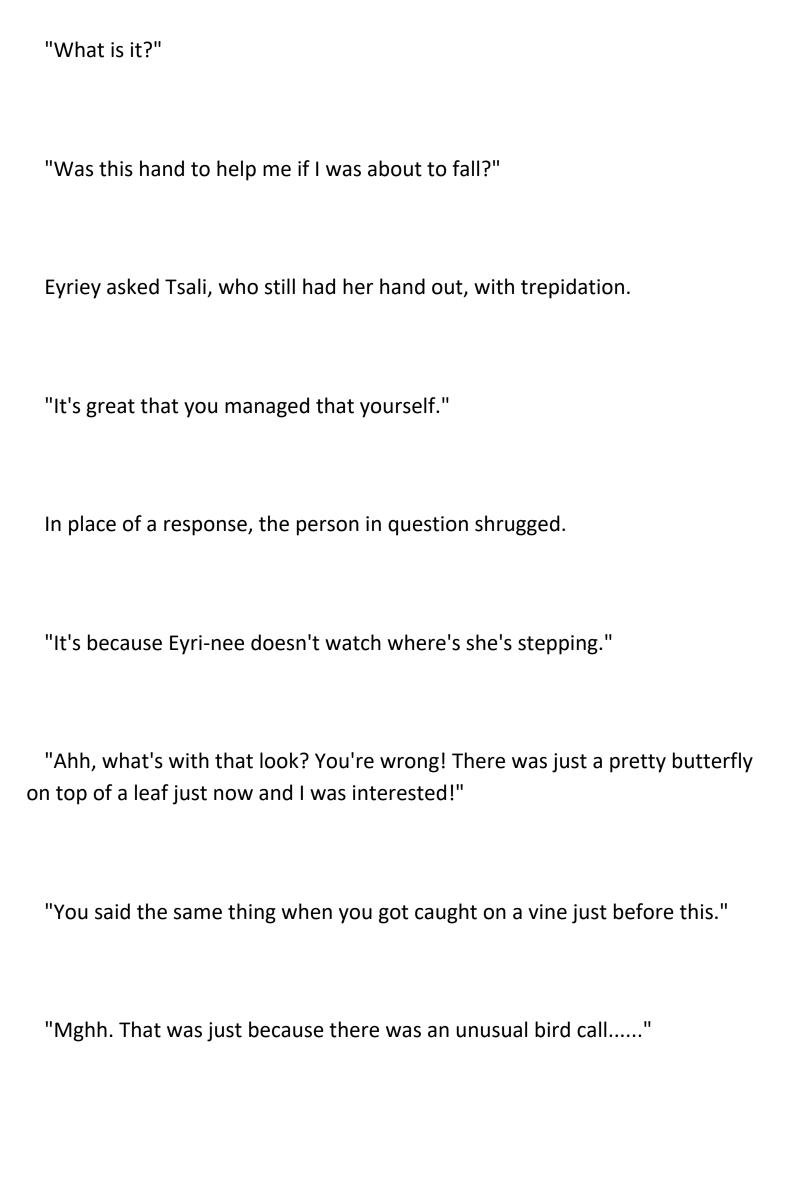


The strength to take Leon's greatsword head-on. He even repelled it and used the return to unleash a violent stroke upwards. As soon as Leon avoided that with inhuman reaction speed, the opponent aimed for his exposed flank with his fist, not giving him even the slightest time to fix his posture.
That was an irregular fighter.
Any swordsman other than Leon would likely be unable to even react to the first counter.
Is this man also a Lord of Unusual Books?
But why does he resemble Leon to this degree? I can't think of him as some stranger.
"Syun-rei."
'I don't know.'
The telepathy came in a shaky and small voice.

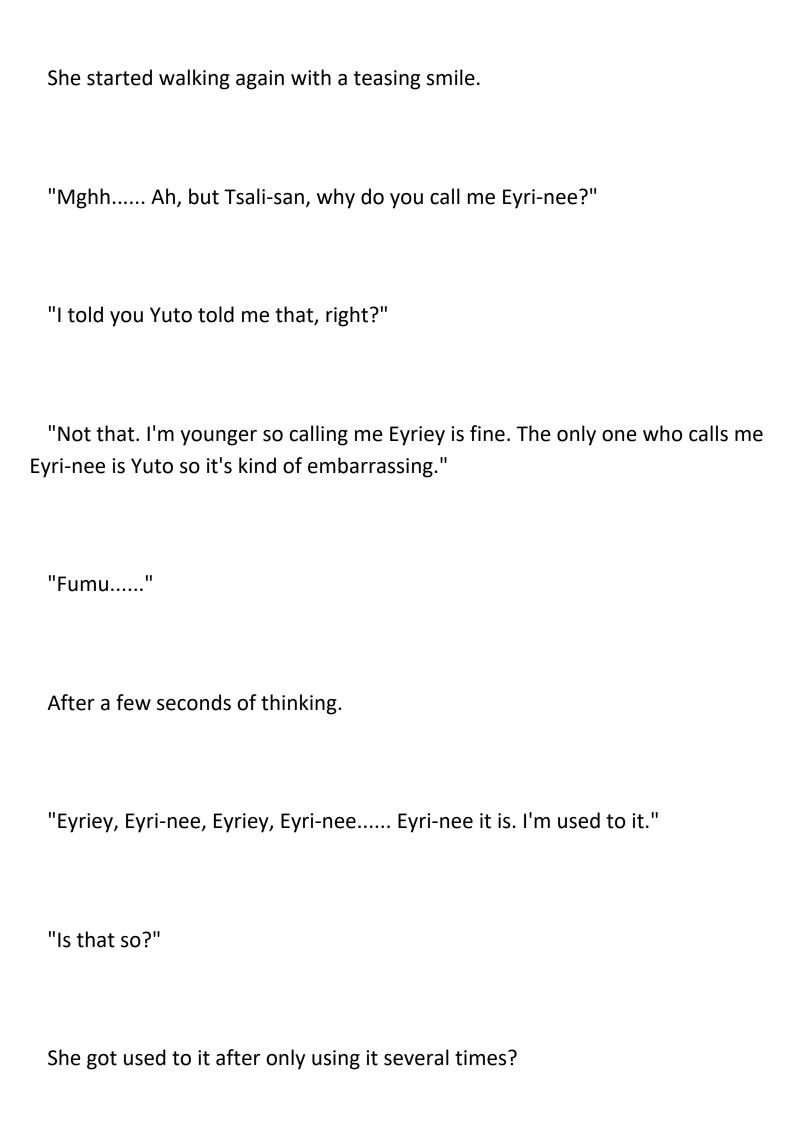
I don't know. In other words, this man's identity was also unknown to Syun-

rei.
'I've pinpointedthe location. It's the fifth ward of the eastern area of the nature district.'
—She wouldn't normally be this panicked.
—Because it's Leon. There's no way he would be surpassed with the greatsword.
She wished for and trusted in that.
But from the battle they had seen just nowit had been only a moment, but wasn't Leon the one being pressured?
'Leon.'
Syun-rei's words like a prayer echoed through the tower and dispersed into thin air.

—Clack.
Her boot lightly collided against a tree root sticking out of the ground.
"Ohhtoh, toh. That was close."
She placed a hand against the tree trunk and steadied herself from her pitched forward posture.
"Oh, you managed to keep yourself standing?"
The guard slightly ahead was facing her with a wry smile.
Looking at the hand that was offered to her—
"Hey, Tsali-san."



"No, no, it's not like I'm poking fun at you."
Tsali pulled back her hand and once again turned around and started walking. That tone of voice sounded more like she was enjoying Eyriey's reactions.
"Children have many more things besides their feet to look at. It's endearing if you consider falling to be an expression of curiosity."
"I feel like that statement is highlighting the children part too much."
"It's true you're a child though?"
Tsali laughed and, for some reason, her gaze was directed at Eyriey's chest—
"Your underwear size hasn't changed since a year ago."
"Wh-why do you know that!?"
"This older sister knows many things."













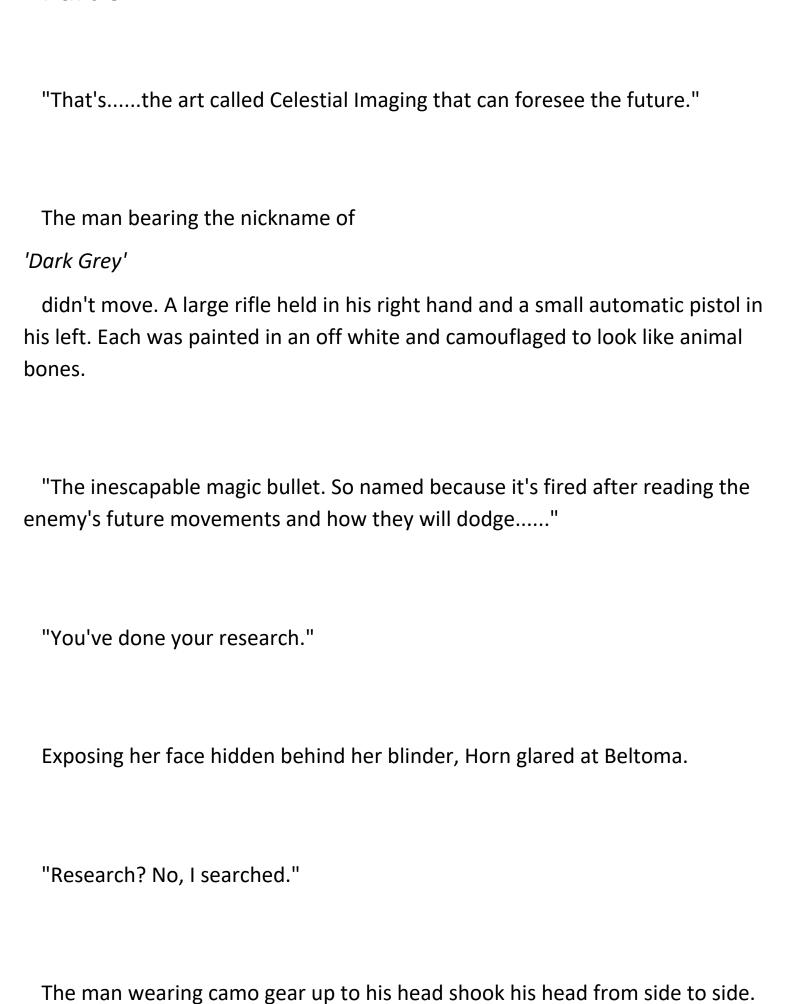
What to do. Fool them with an excuse when we're spotted? Or is it time for the debut of my back-up anti-molester pepper spray?
Before she could come to a conclusion, a shadow appeared from the passage.
A shadow resembling a human. It was covered in iron armor from the top of its head to the tips of its toes, with a massive mechanical left arm and a machine gun for a right. The mark glowing blue atop its armor was probably a shinryoku seal.
—A heavy mechanical soldier equipped with even anti-Yuugenshu weaponry. And a great number of them enough to clot up the passageway.
"W-wait a second!?"
Rather than guards, aren't these battle machines for eliminating vicious animals or Yuugenshu? And with these numbers, if a flesh-and-blood human were to take those attacks
Crap.

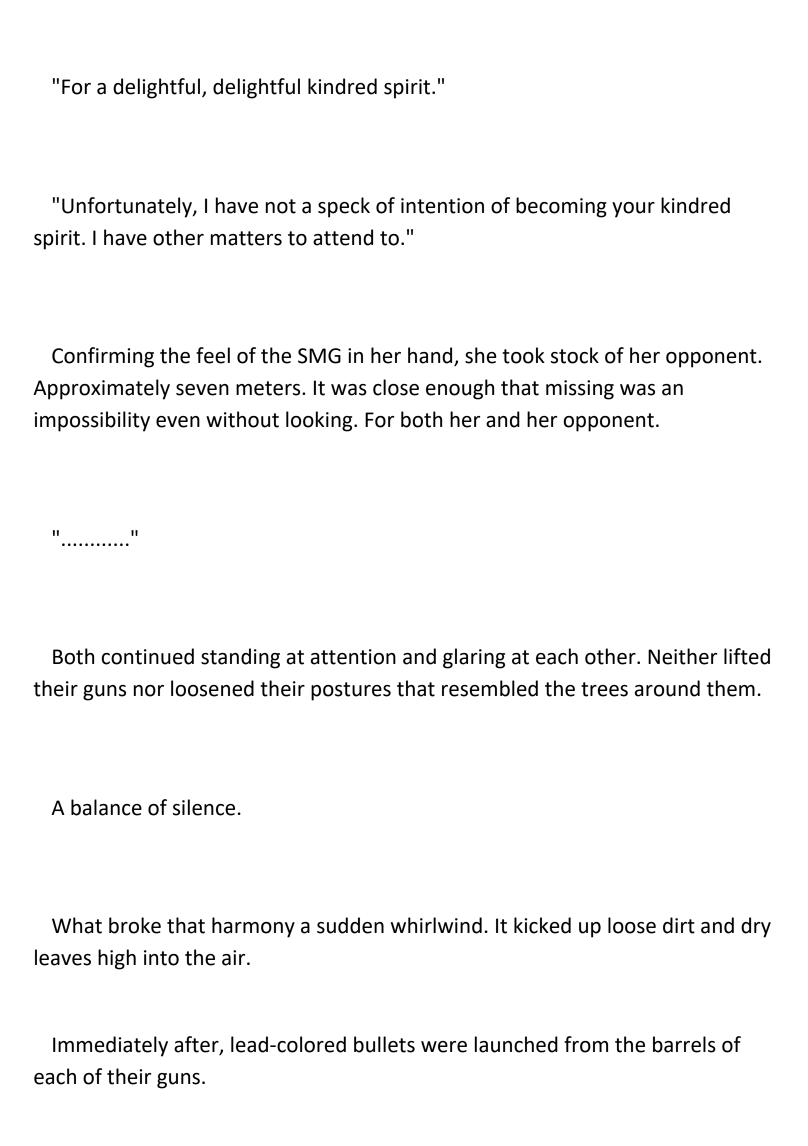


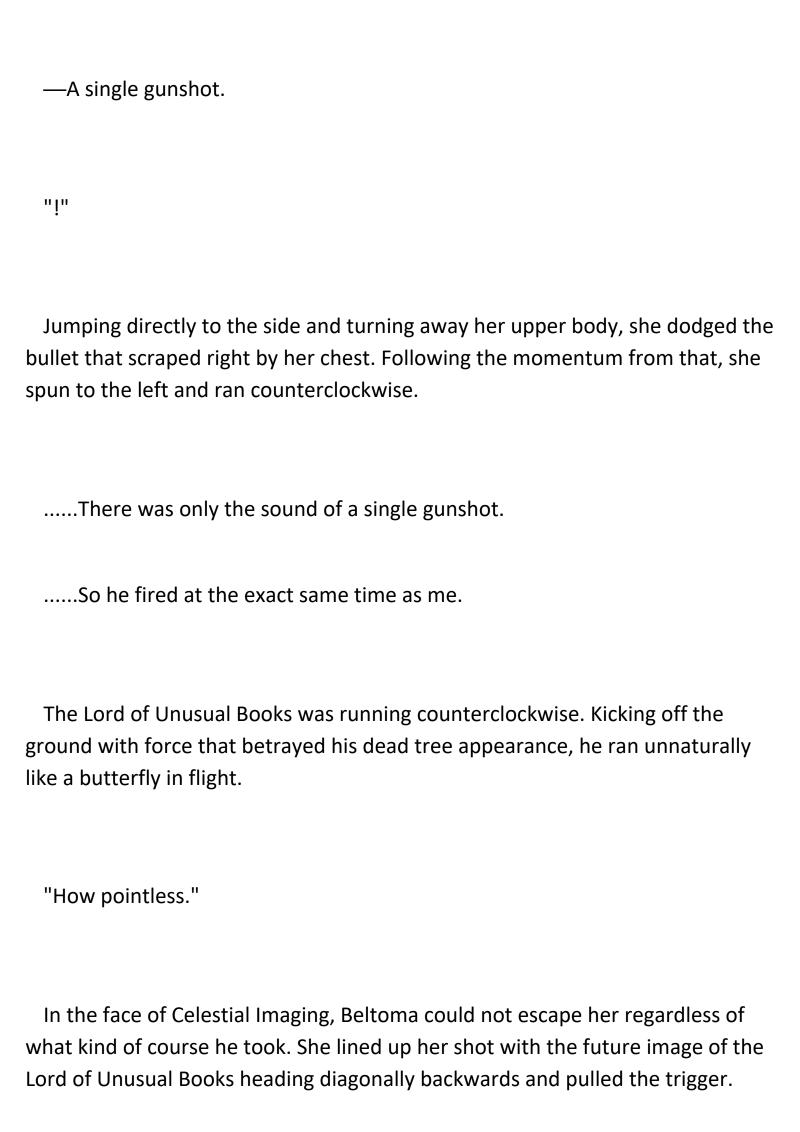
"I told you I'm an outstanding guard, right?"
Clatter. She smiled calmly while standing on the bullets that were supposed to have been fired at them just now.
She cut them out of the air? No, that not it. The bullets themselves changed their flight path downwards. I don't get the reason behind it but that's what it feels like.
"So shall we get going, Eyri-nee? The search looks like it's about to get interesting."
"Huh? But just in front of us—"
"Is something there?"
Being asked a question in response, Eyriey blinked repeatedly. The dozens of heavy robotic soldiers had already fallen and stopped moving.
"Eh? H-how did you"

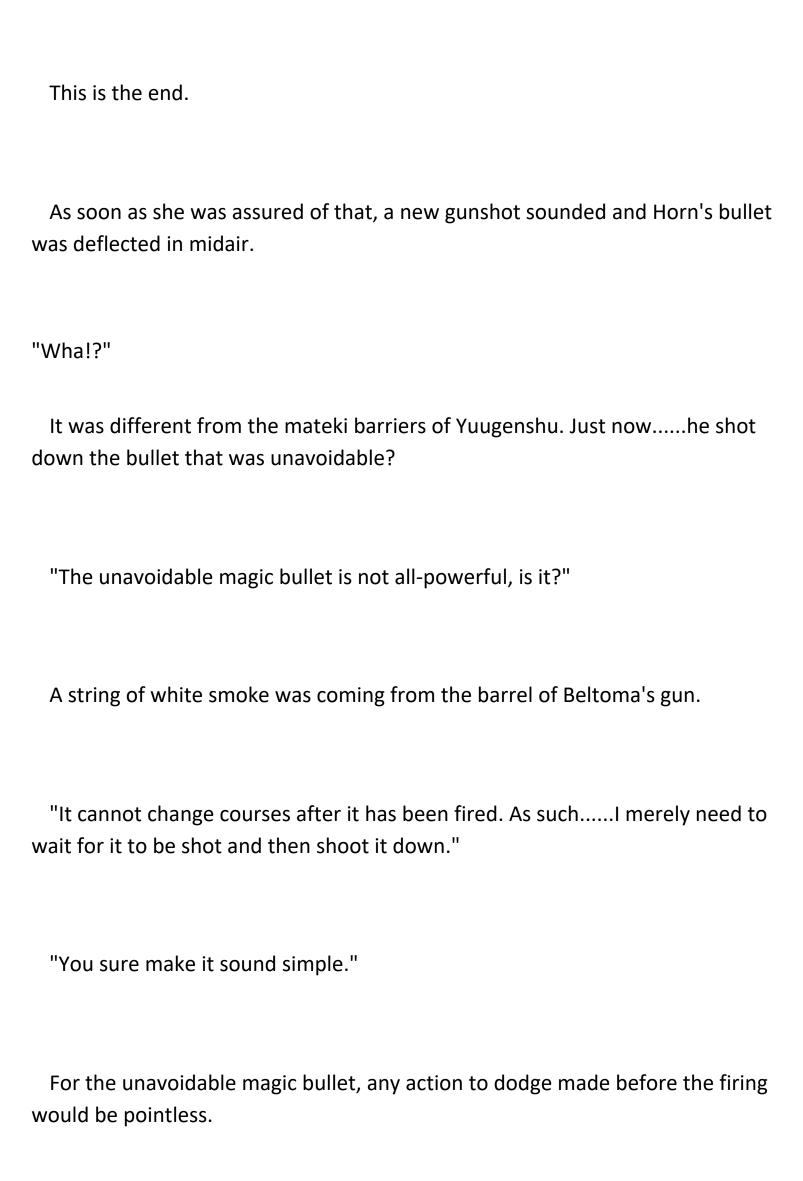
"Who knows? Maybe my charm is effective on machines too so they surrendered."
Maybe there was some kind of trick or she used techniques like Sheltis such that Eyriey couldn't process it. No matter how much she thought about it, Eyriey couldn't understand it.
"O-ohhhhhhhh!? I don't really get it but you're amazing, Tsali-san!"
"Have you calmed down, milady?"
Brushing her glossy bangs to the side, Tsali started walking again.
"We'll be moving faster for a bit. It looks like there's a lot of ground to cover."

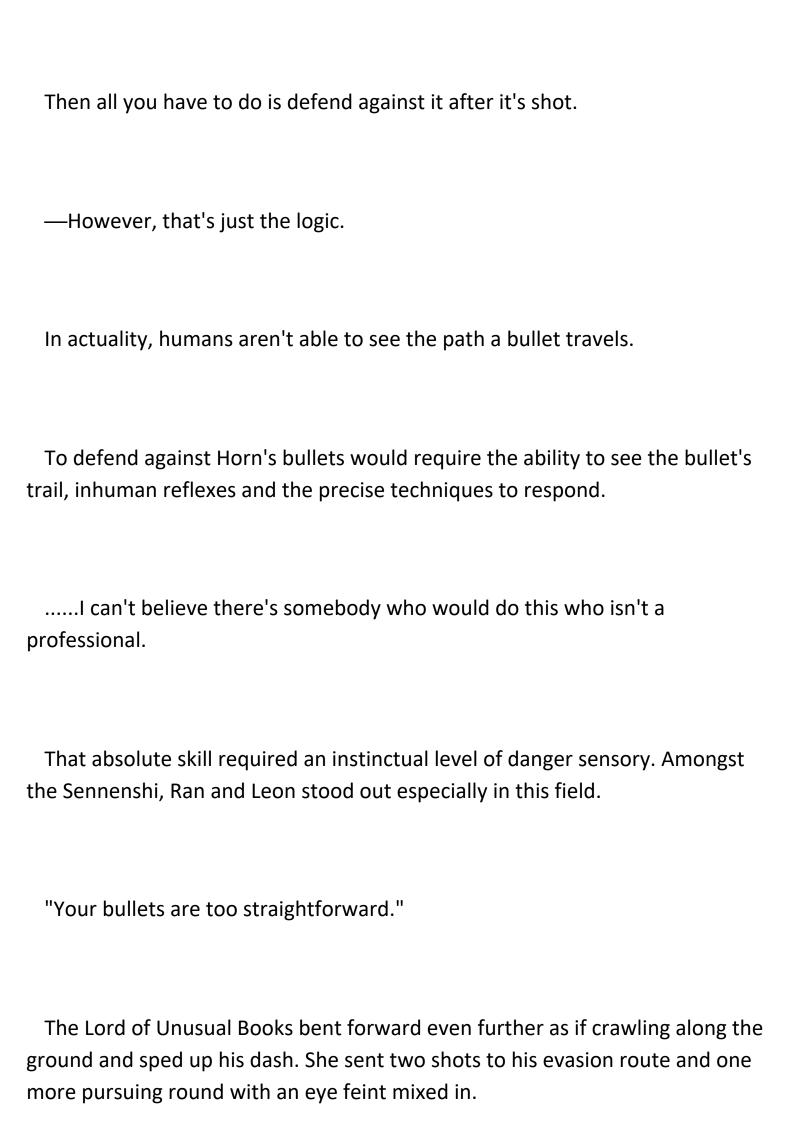
Part 6

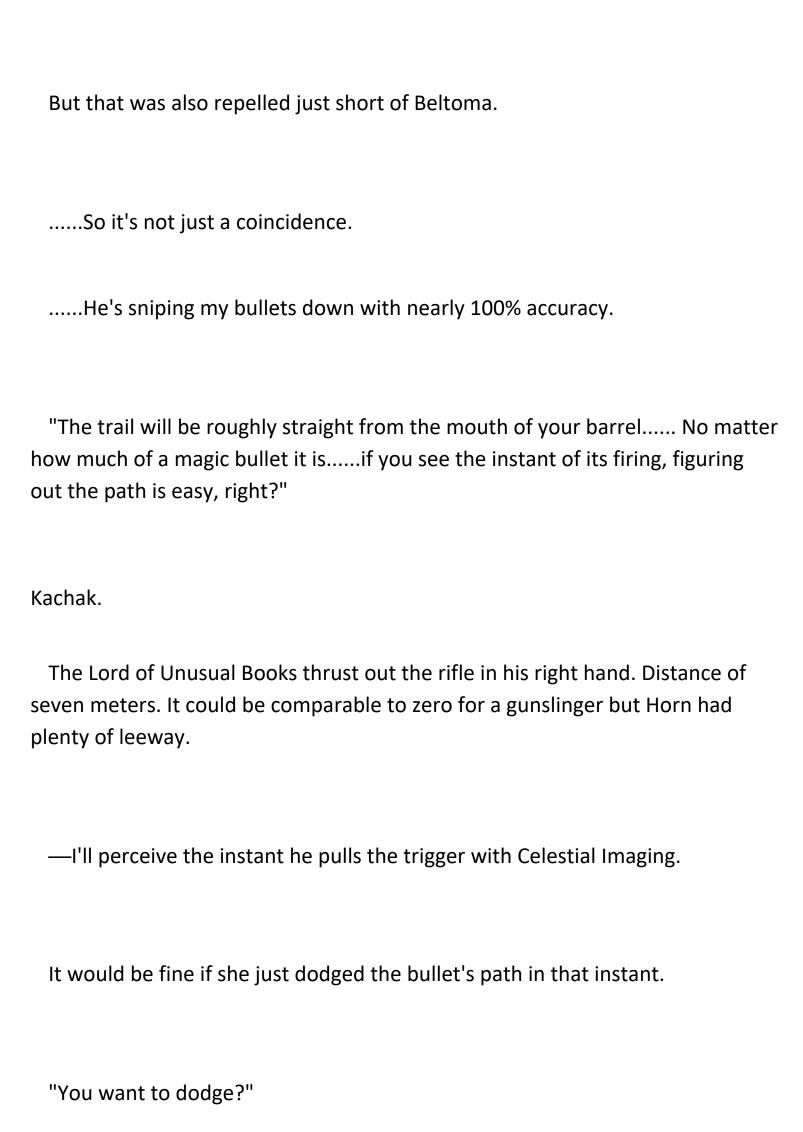


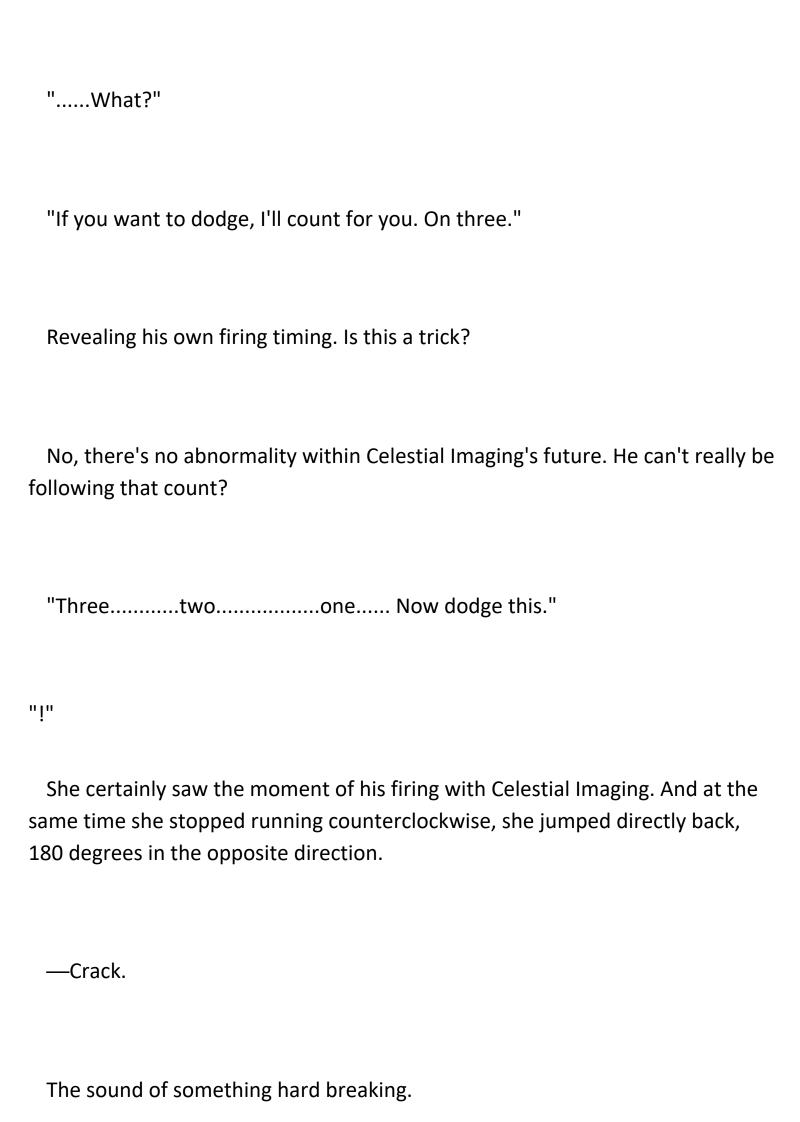


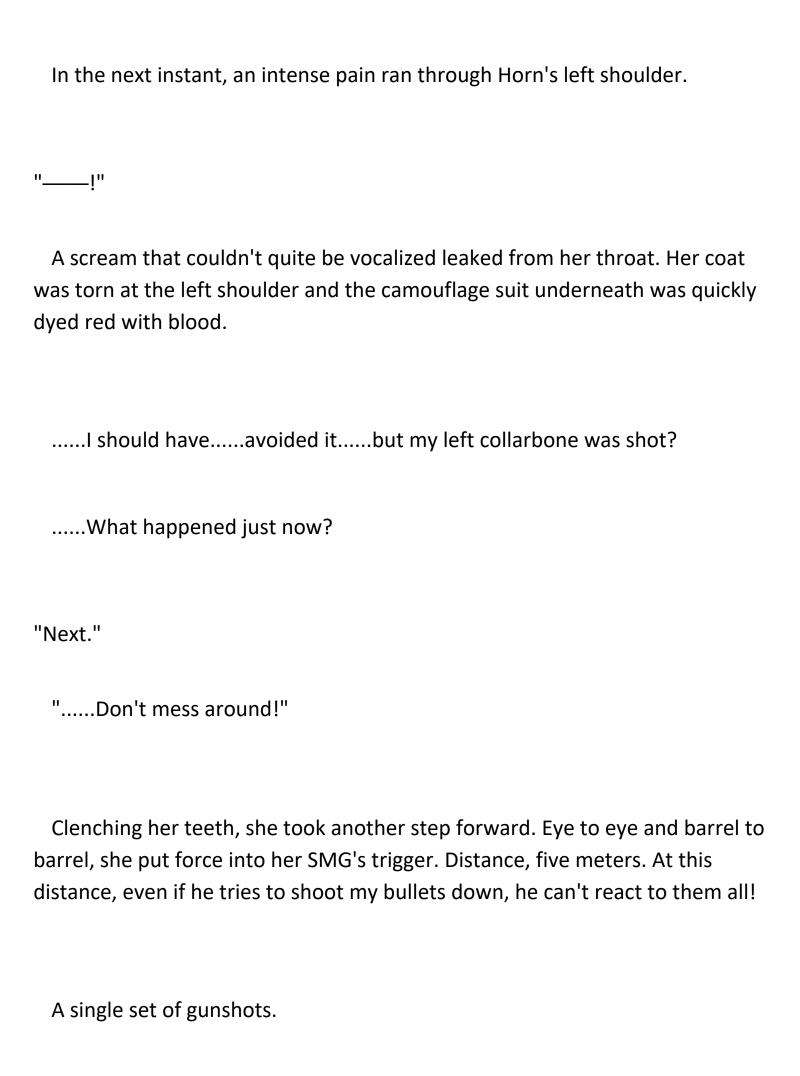


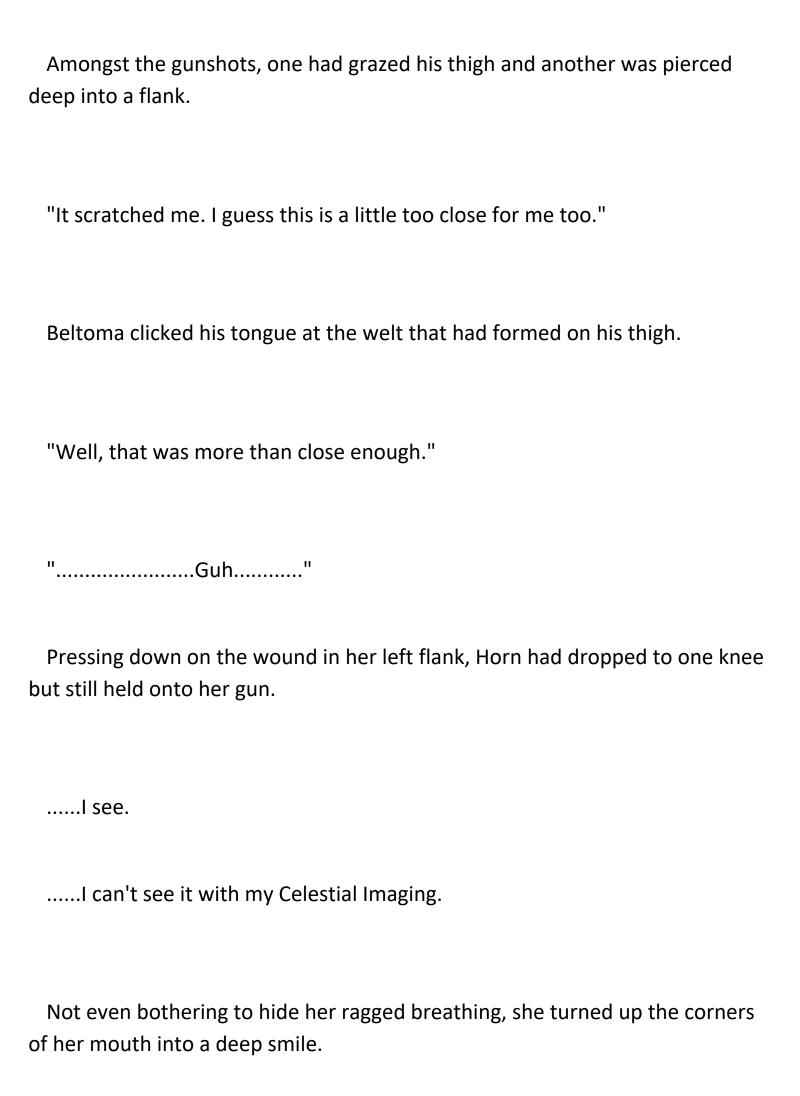


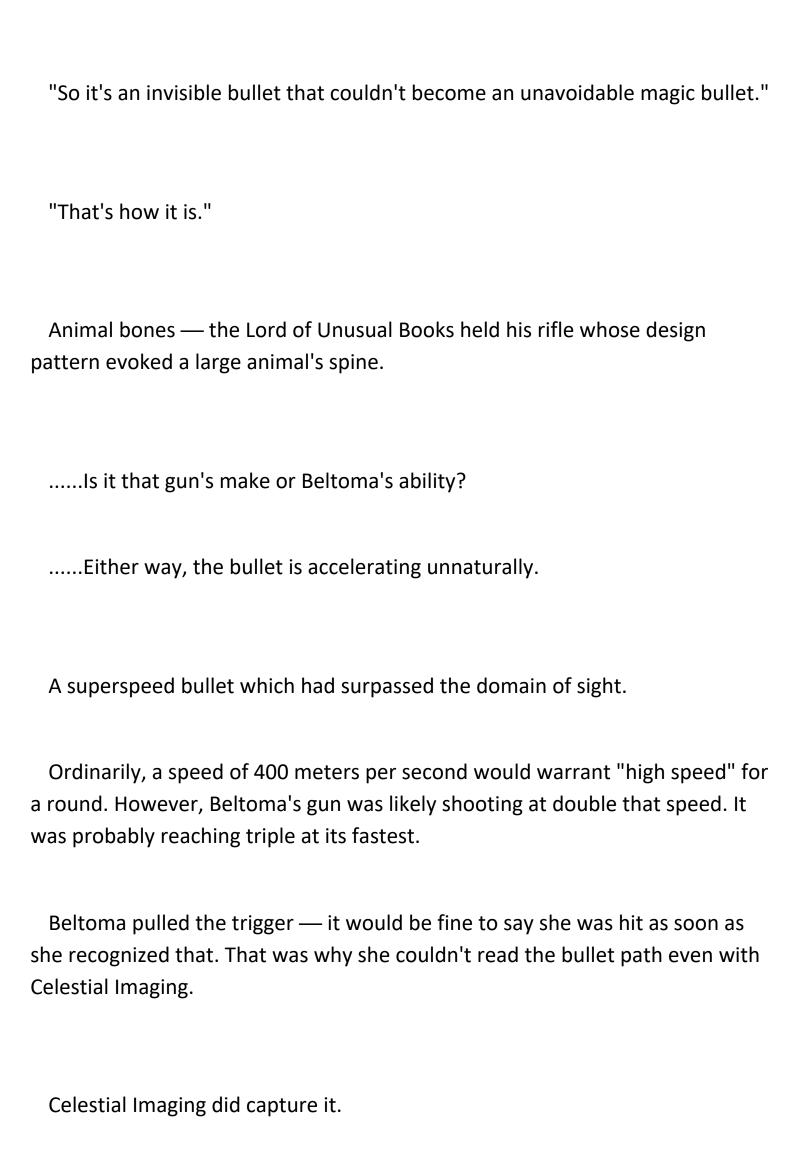


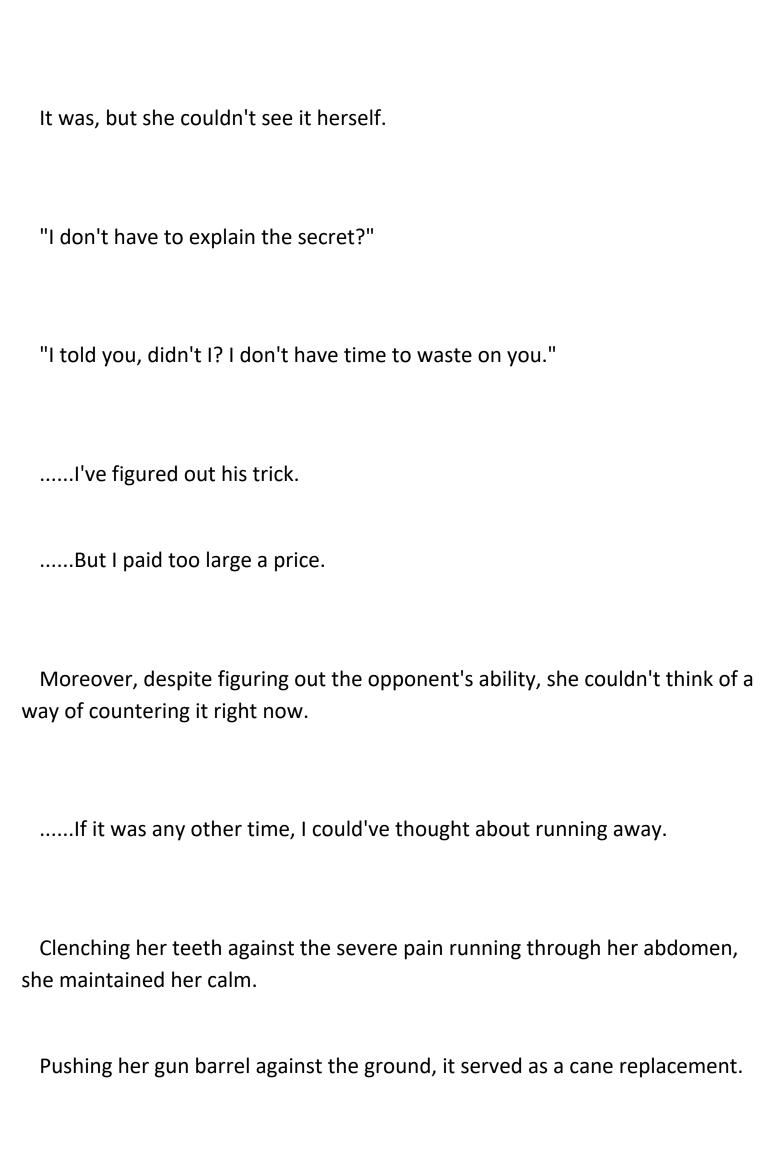


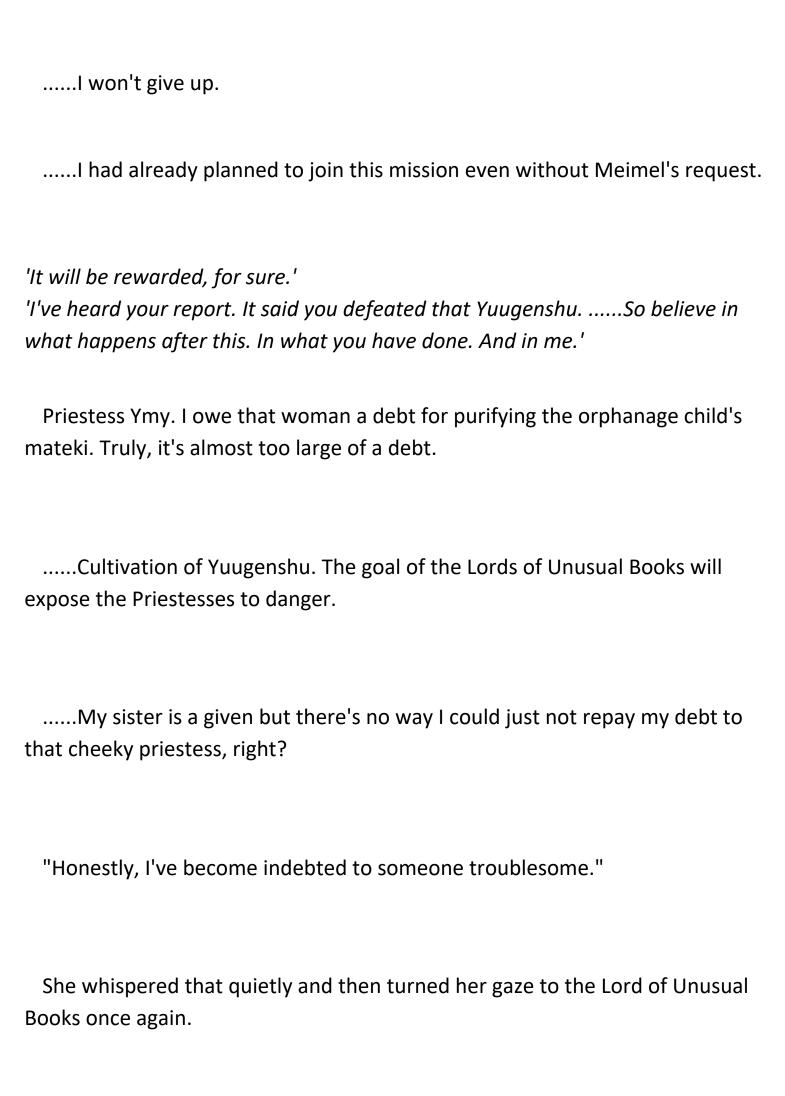


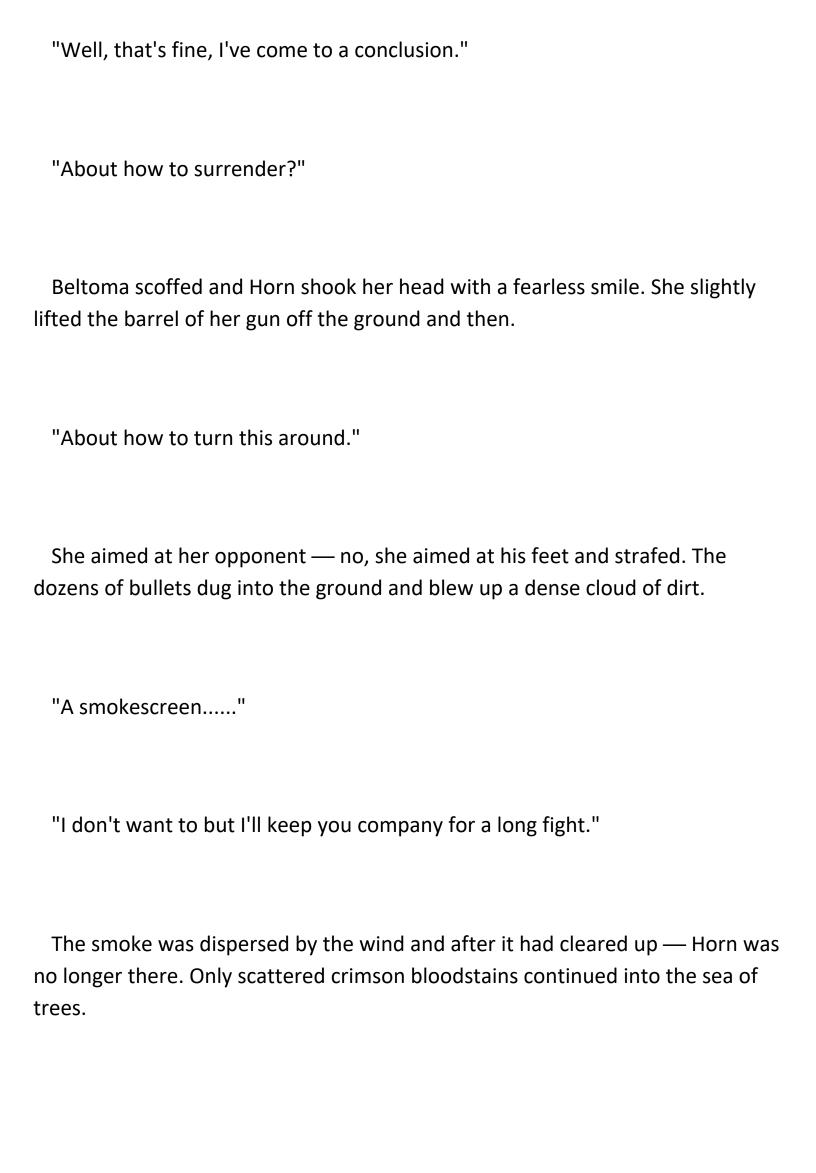




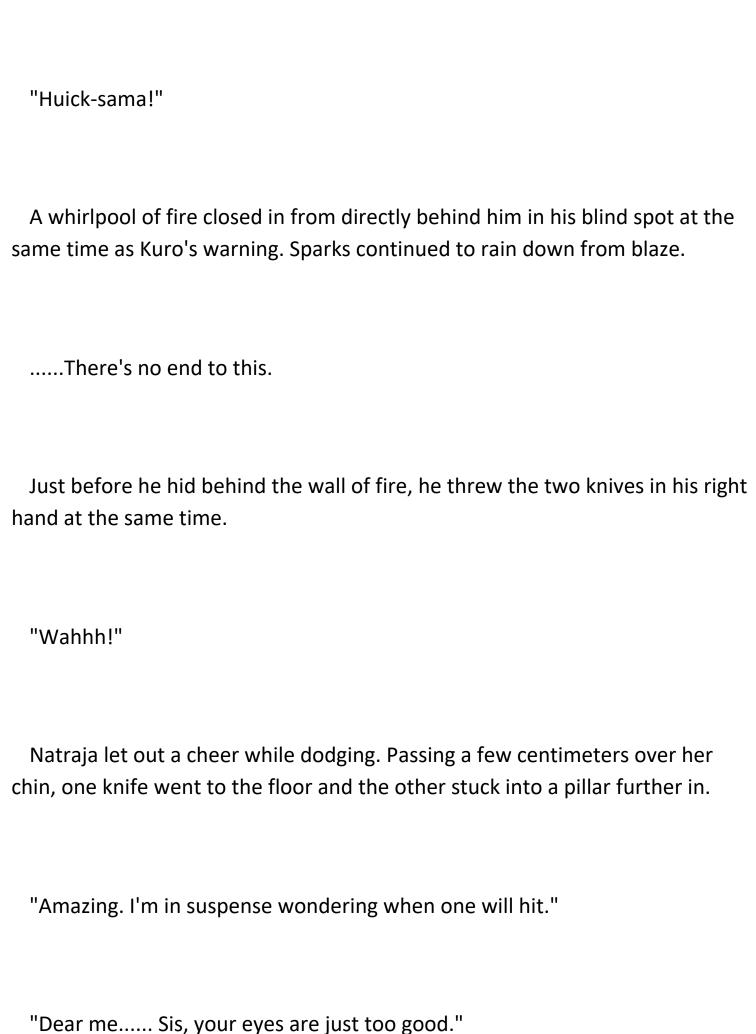


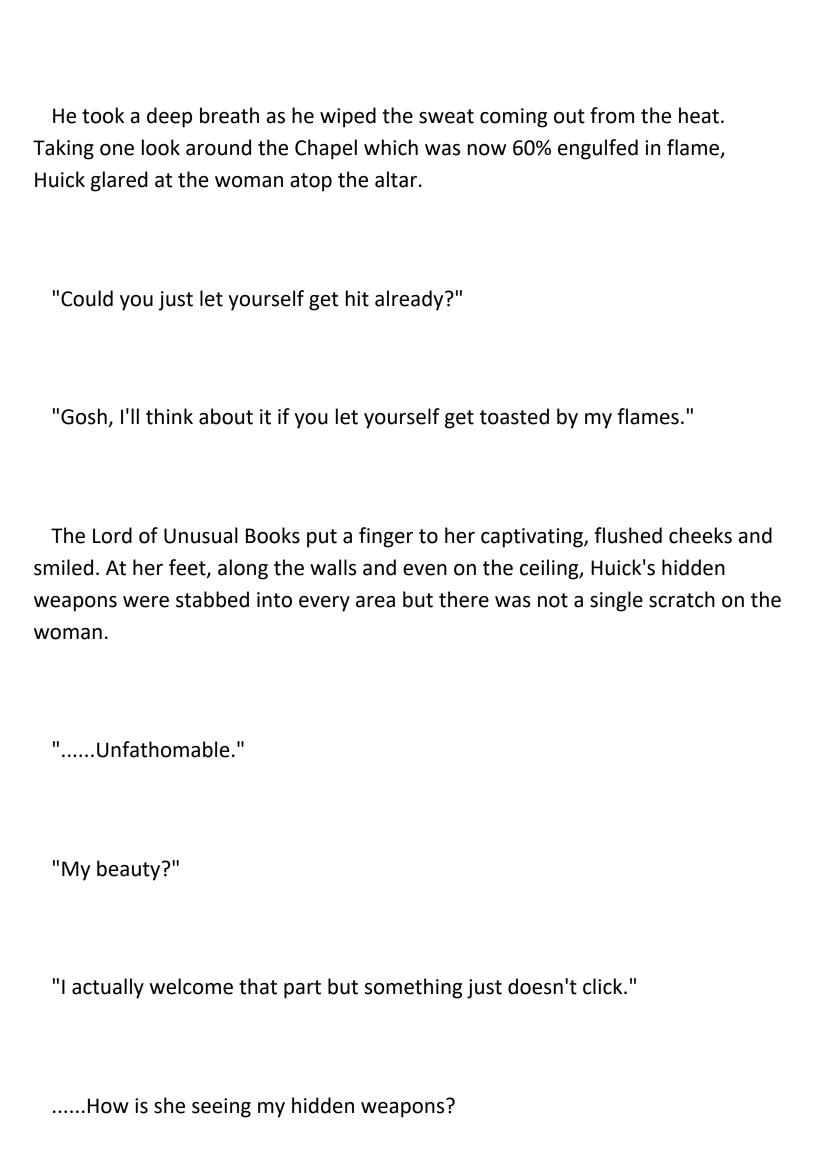






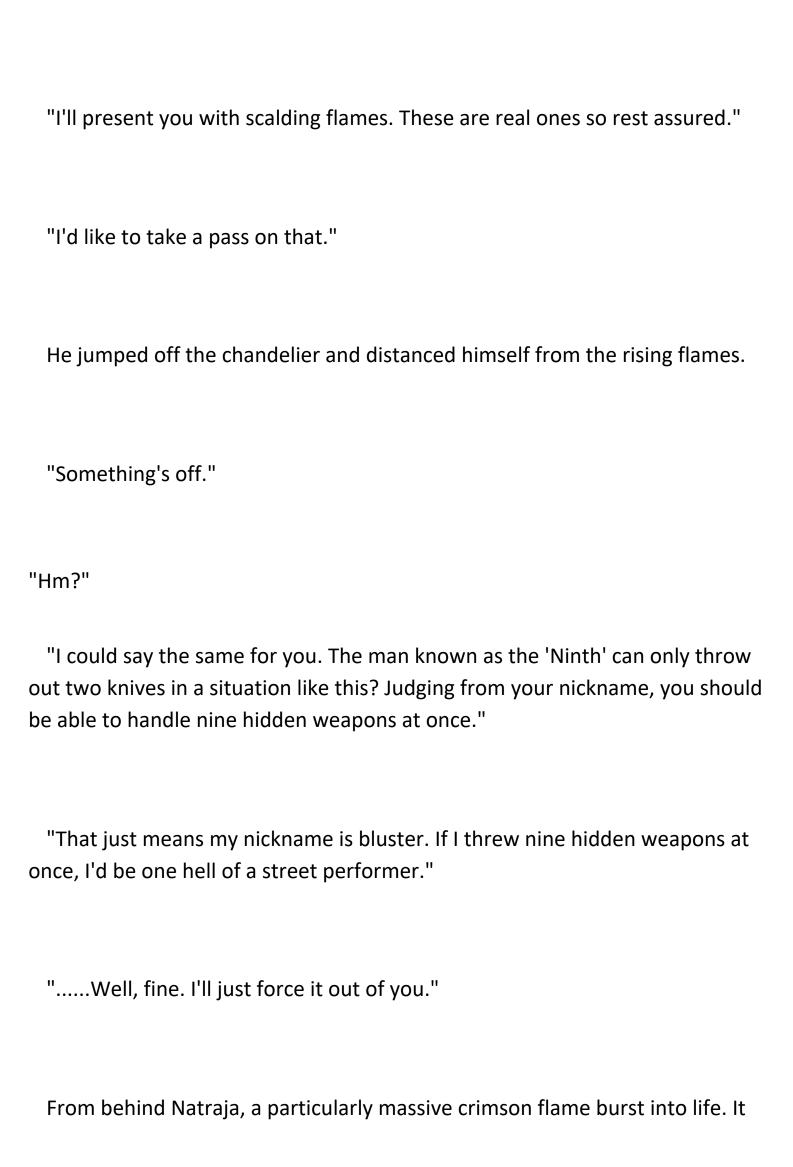
Part 7







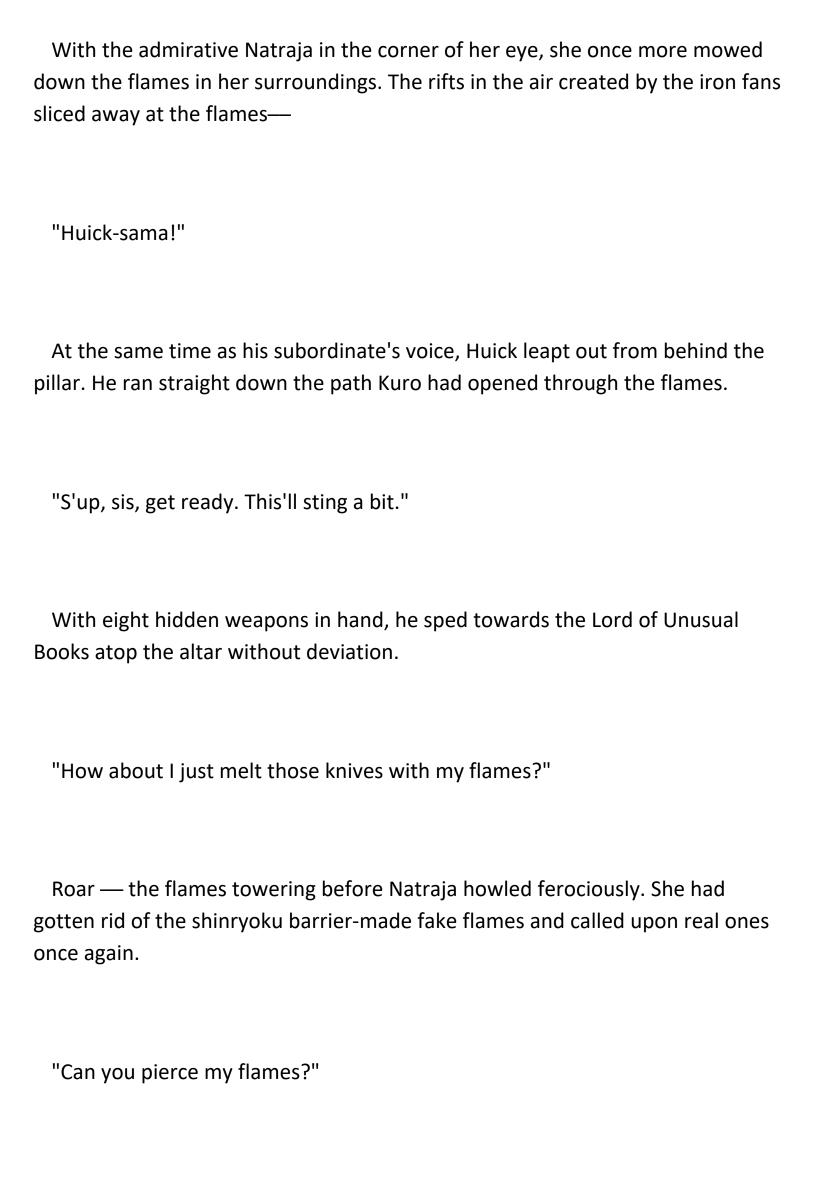
He became convinced after seeing everything from the ceiling to the floor. Natraja's flames were split into those that burned their surroundings and those that did not.
"True flames that give off heat and light. The other type is just red light with no heat. It's a shinryoku barrier that's fashioned to look like flames."
II II
"I think barrier arts are blue by default? That would give it away too easily so you're using baptism arts which give out red light with them and have that wrapped around yourself. You sense my hidden weapons the instant they enter that territory. And that's how you're seeing them."
"Mm, correct."
Natraja scratched her cheek shyly.
"How surprising, I wonder how long it's been since I was seen through on the first encounter?"
"Do I get a reward?"

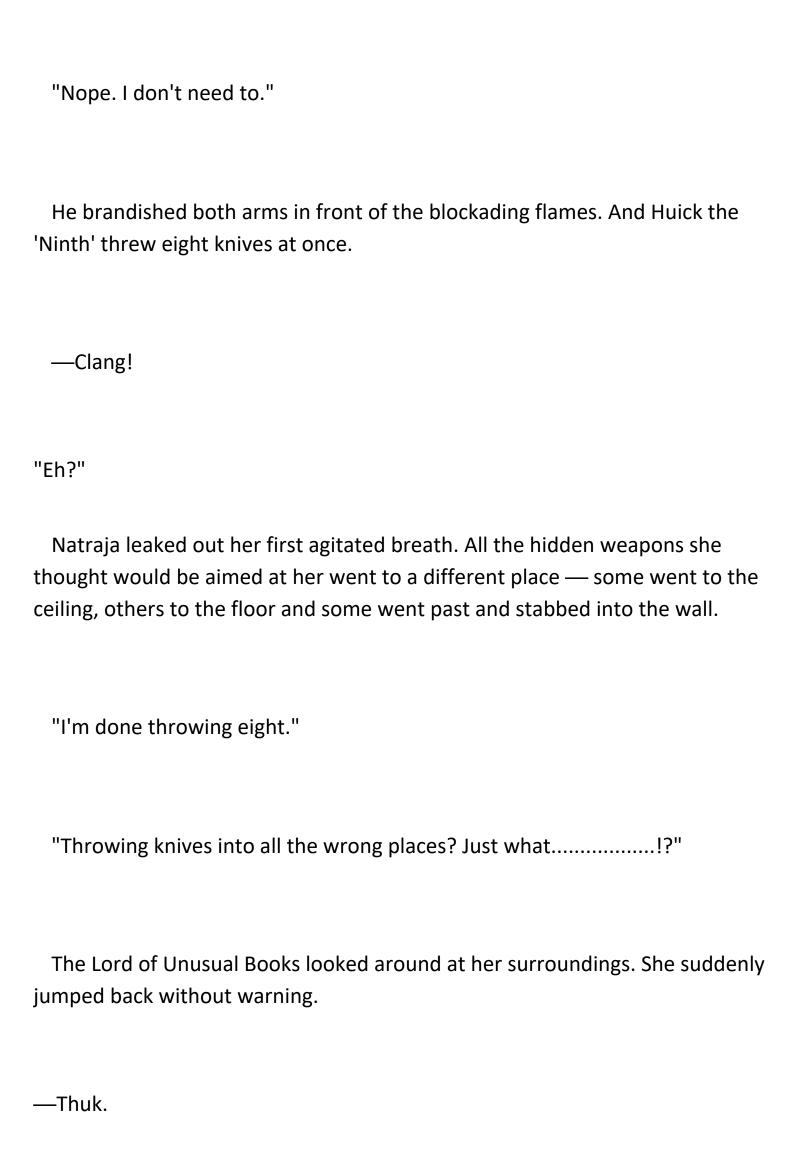


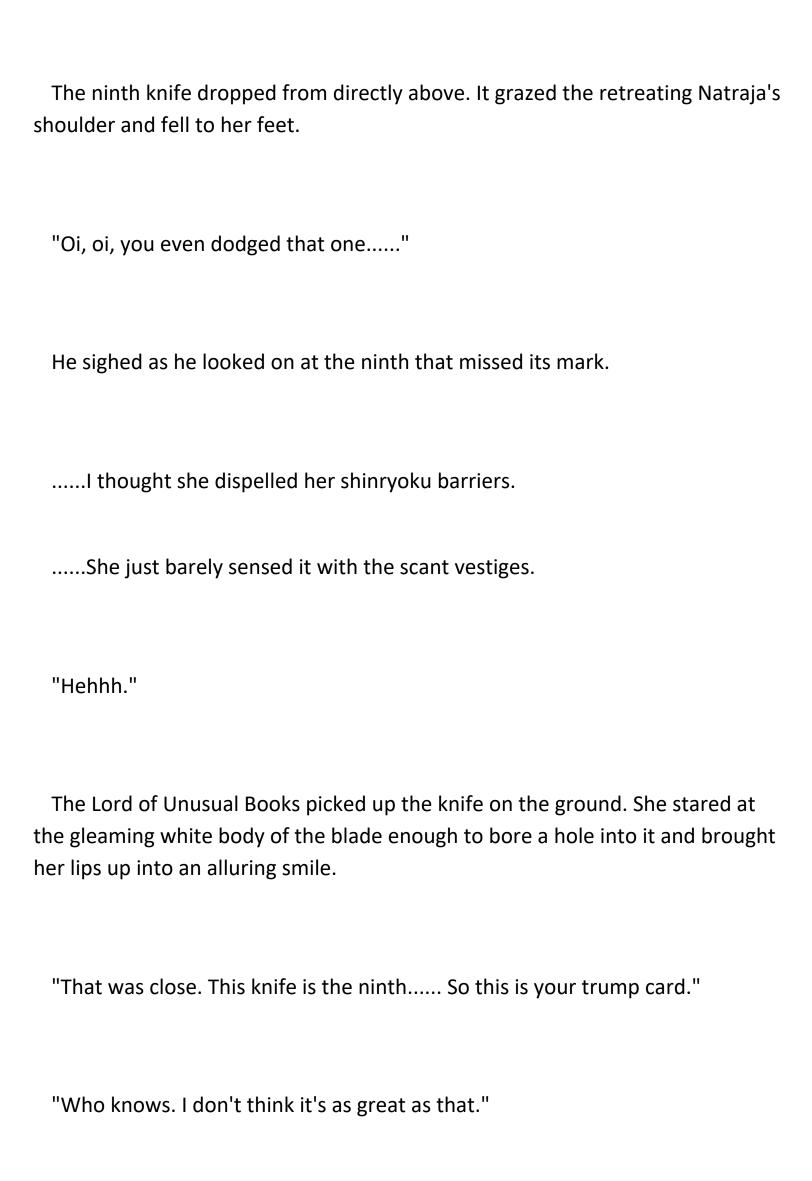










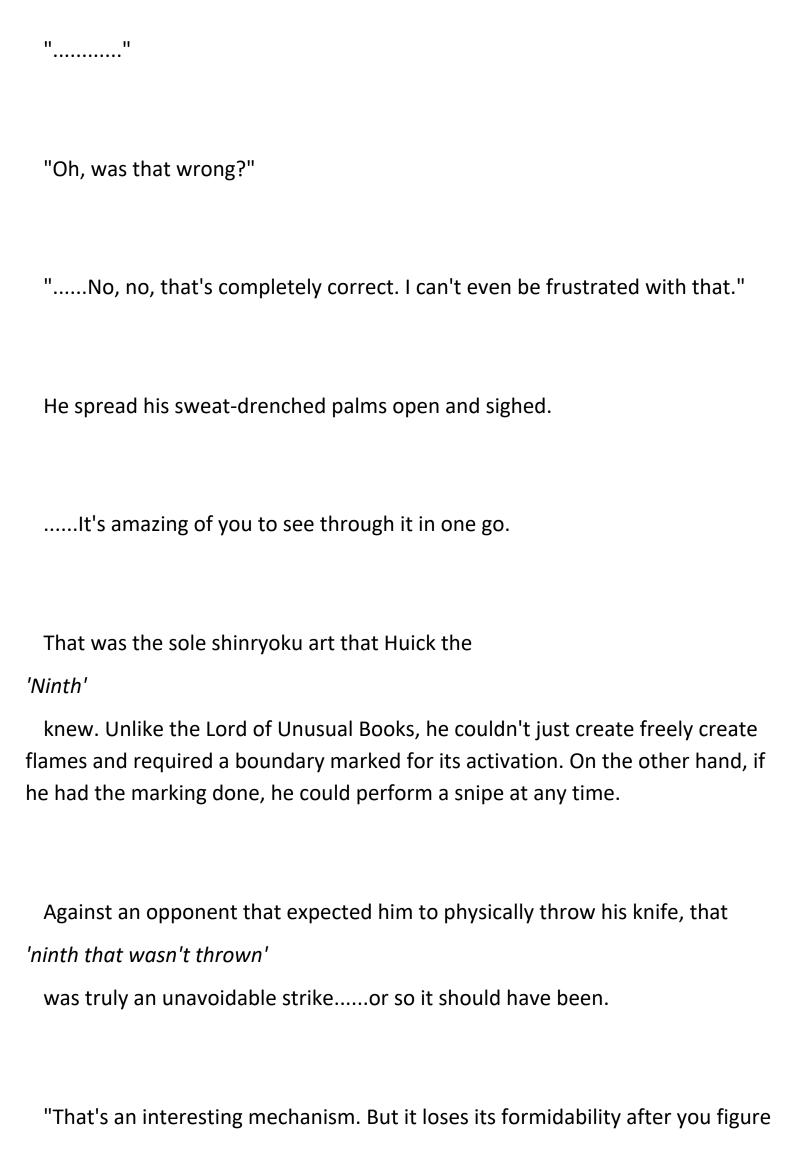


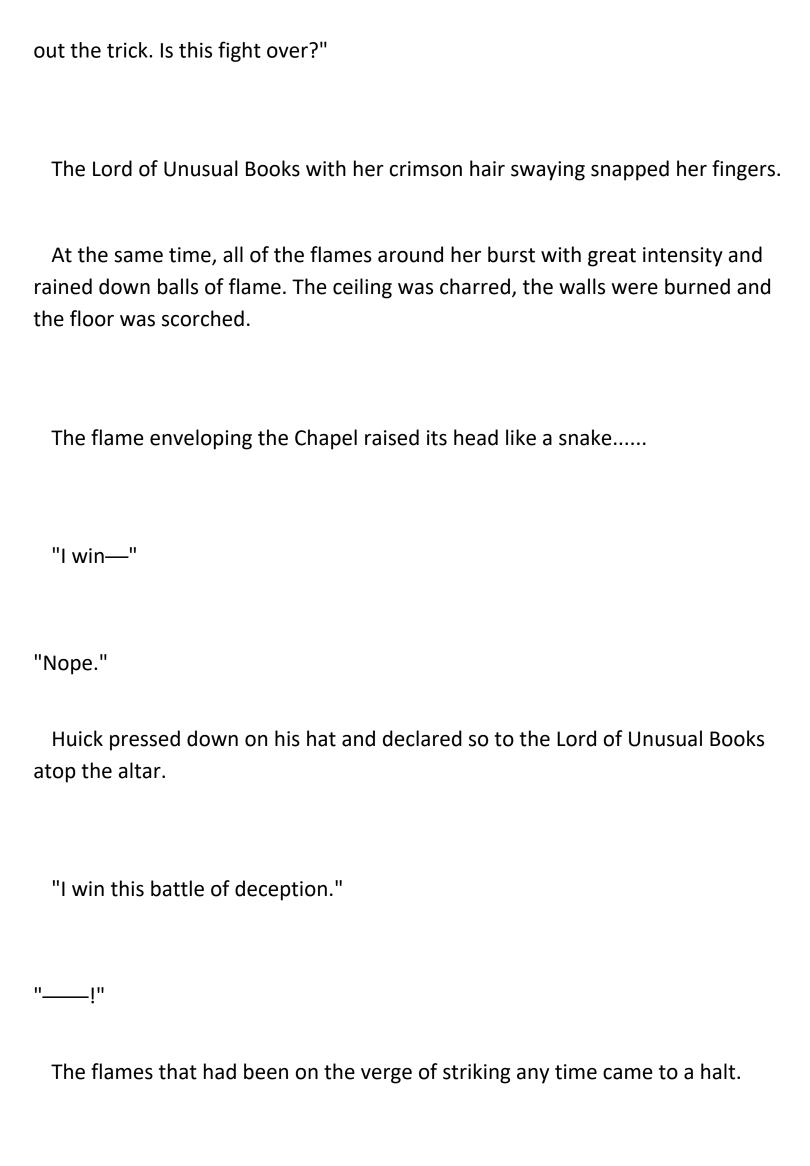
would be normal for the tip to have melted from my flames. I also didn't see you make to throw something after the first eight."
She ran her finger along the blade and exaggeratedly tilted her head.
"I still have questions This knife isn't a real one. It's made to look like iron but it's actually iron molecules that have been given form with advent-type shinryoku arts. And the eight you threw beforehand. These are real but they're covered in a thin layer of shinryoku. Does that serve some purpose?"
"Sis, are you a researcher by heart?"
"I suppose. If it's analyzing something intriguing like thisfor example."
Throwing aside the knife, she calmly stood upon the altar with her arms crossed.

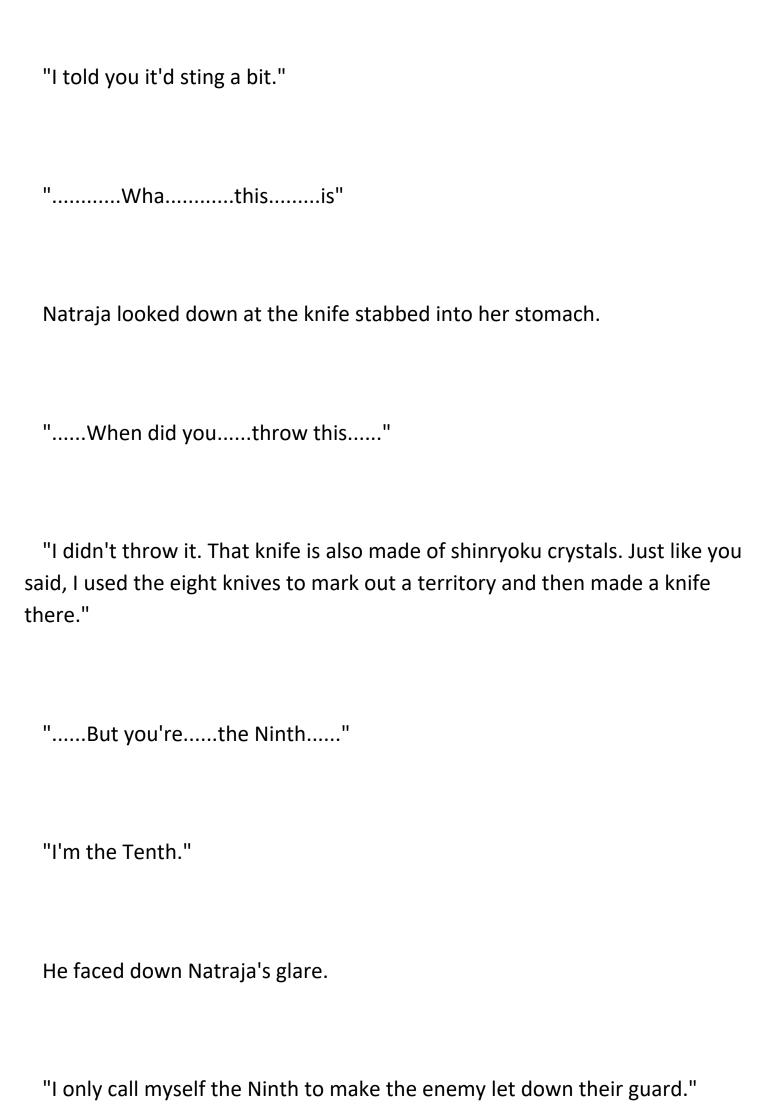
"With the eight knives serving as the boundaries of an area, you can create

the ninth knife there — How about that for a hypothesis?"









The man called the Ninth would undoubtedly use nine weapons. That's what she would think unconsciously but unfortunately for her, Huick was not naive enough to let his tricks slip out ahead of time.

.....Well, the truth is that I'm not actually the Tenth either.

"Guh."

Her one-piece's midsection was stained bright red. She removed the knife from her stomach with an annoyed look but ended up crouching in anguish.

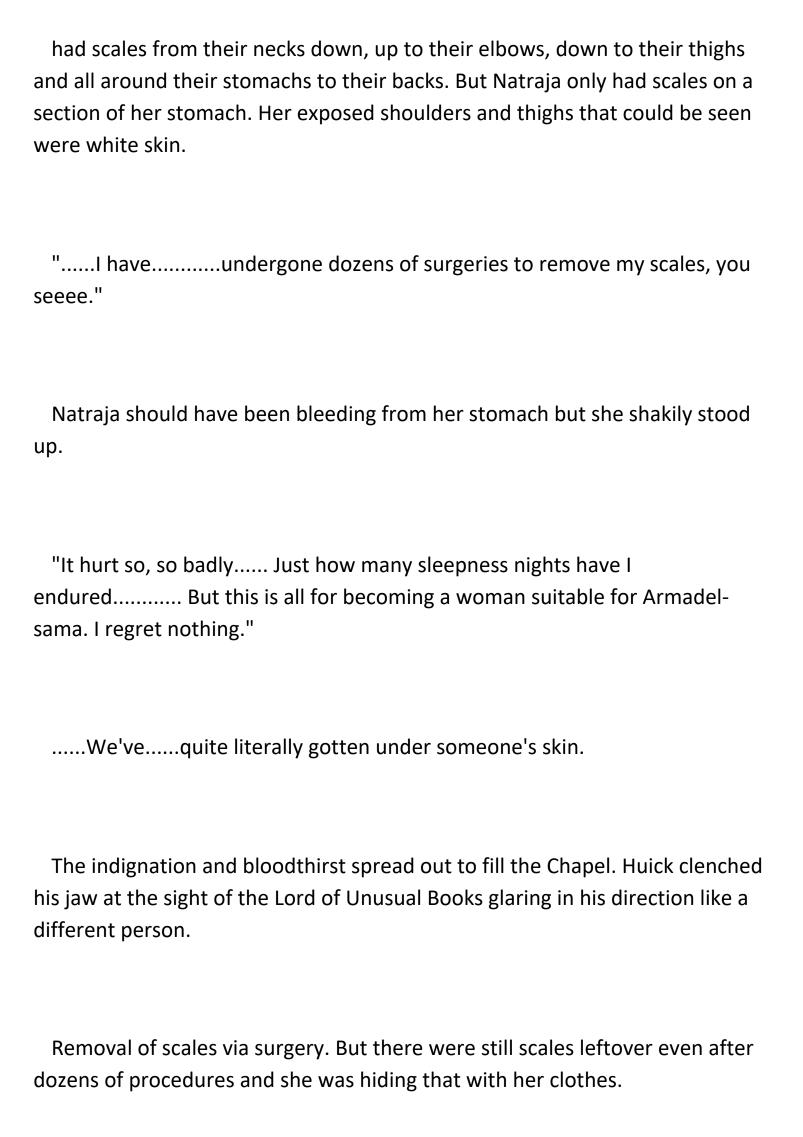
"You should stop that. Your organs aren't really damaged but your abdominal muscles should be shredded. If you don't settle down, that pricey-looking dress is going to get even redder....."

Huick stopped what he was saying and stared at her. He could see her stomach while she was crouched over. Her bare skin was in view behind the ripped cloth. That bare skin was covered in scales giving off a dark green lustre.

—This is.

"So yousaw it."
A voice that could be mistaken for a lump of pure hatred rumbled through the Chapel.
"Huick-sama, this woman isone of the 'Koh nomads'."
They were a race of demi-humans that covertly lived in areas with blizzards, torrential downpours, deserts, etc. that rarely appeared on Orbie Clar save for the absolutely bare minimum.
They had excellent kinetic vision and physical prowess as a strong point and her special characteristic was the dark green scales that could be seen covering her skin. The skin had come from evolution to survive the harsh climates but the majority of the
'Koh nomads'
hated exposing their skin, with many of them living their lives hiding it.
"Yeah, but what does this mean?"
From what Huick knew, those with scales amongst the

'Koh nomads'



"But this is ironic."
She pointed directly below her chest. The knife wound that should have been stabbed in deeply was strangely shallow and the bleeding had already stopped. The resilient scales had caught the knife and stopped it at just the skin.
"You and Iwe are all unfortunate."
The Lord of Unusual Books descended step after step from the altar.
"You twohaveseen something that you should not have. That which I did not want to show anyone except Armadel-sama."
Her high heels lit ablaze with a small pop. Those flames caught onto the edge of her one-piece and her body was wrapped in crimson flames. The flames grew stronger as her crimson hair and white skin were burned.
Burning herself with her own flames?
Is it beyond her control?

"—You unforgivable two."
The instant the metallic decorations atop the altar were licked by a section of the flames, they melted into a pool. Similarly, the ceiling and even the massive stone pillars touched by the flames were melting and shedding stone-colored droplets.
The blaze behind her blew up into the form of a massive tsunami. Just looking up at it hurt as the heat baked his eyes. Its intensity was like looking directly at the sun.
"Such heat!?"
This is abnormal. Taking this unprotected is an act of suicide.
—How about Kuro's iron fans? No, those will be melted by the flames.
—Hiding behind the pillars? No, that flame will just melt them in an instant.
Defense and evasion were both impossible. He had no methods available to intercept those flames.

"—I will have you taste the same pain!"
It was simultaneous. At the same time Huick and his subordinate made for the exit, Natraja's tsunami of flame pushed forward.
"Kuro, don't look back! Your eyes will fry!"
The approaching wall of flame. The tsunami that was high enough to reach the ceiling was approaching with frightening might. It melted the chandelier, the pillars and burned the floor marble black in an instant.
"Tch!"
Leaving the Chapel, they headed for the three-way fork that they had separated with Leon and Sheltis at.
"Not yet!"
Kuro's scream. Even as the flames burned away the surrounding walls without a trace, they closed in without losing any momentum.
Can we escape?

"Run to the entrance! Don't get engulfed in the flames no matter what you do!"
Back turned to the incoming flames, Huick shouted at his subordinate.
An instant.
The passage they were in was dyed crimson with scarlet, roaring flames—

Part 8

Δn	omen	Ωf	win	Ч
AII	omen	OL	wiii	u.

The super high-speed swordplay that severed the air and even created vacuums was already beyond both of their abilities to see.

.....Focus. Don't miss the sound of the wind.

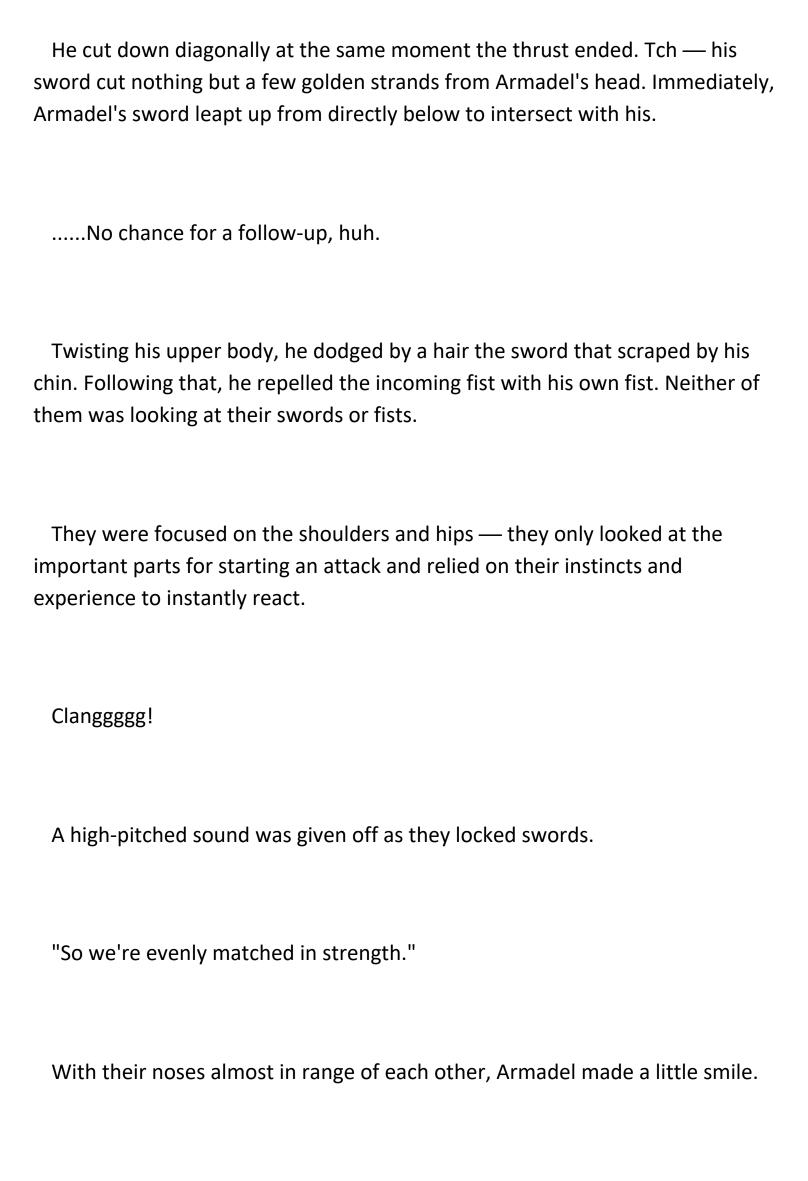
In response to the shadow before him retreating back, he did the opposite and stepped in strongly to pursue. He put the strength from his back foot into his back, from his back into his shoulders, and swung his greatsword—

A slash.

"|"

Without swinging down his greatsword, Leon kicked off the ground and jumped directly to the side. Afterwards, the sword that was thrust out without any warning easily shredded the edge of his coat.

"Hah!"



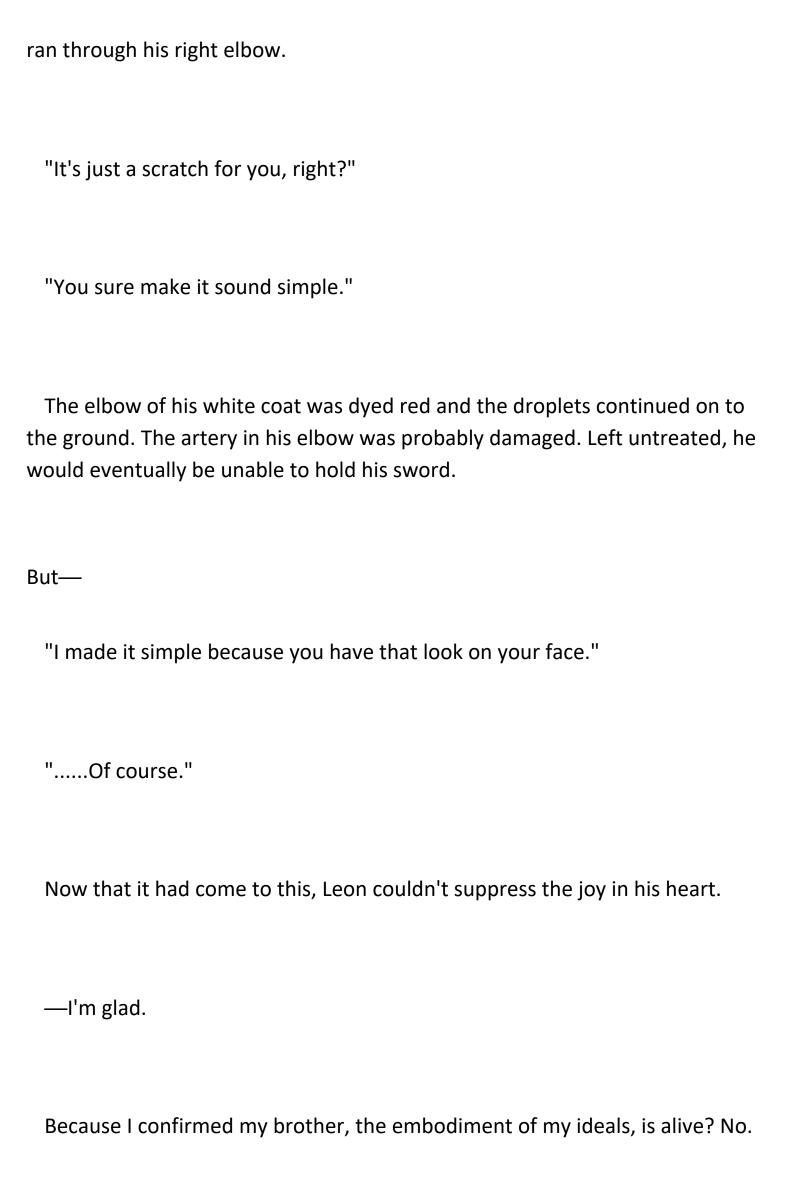


.....There's a gap. I'm slightly below. Physical strength. Reaction speed. Decision-making. Above all else, our training level as greatsword users is different. I'm falling behind him by one step in everything: plain sword speed, technique in chaining together follow-ups, tactics, precision in changing from defense to attack, and so on. A gap in strength. Each difference is slight but the difference our combat strengths when all of them are added up.....is not something so small.This is a Lord of Unusual Books.This is. "Is something wrong?" "I'm glad it was you." Armadel had a doubtful look in his eyes as Leon didn't even attempt to hide

his smile.

"I really am."
Because he was able to confirm his brother survived despite being enemies
No.
"Let's continue."
He gripped his sword with his still-trembling hands. And then dashed. No tricks or anything, he simply added his own speed to his greatsword, a dash a the limits.
Facing him, the blond swordsman wordlessly held his sword above his head
—Two strokes are unnecessary.
He controlled tactics with his eyes, distance with his feet, his sword with his arms and battle with his sword.
nnjnn

A wordless roar.
Not just one of them, both let out cries of fervor at the same time which echoed through the waterfall ravine.
Two flashes.
The intersection of gold and silver lasted but a moment. After that, they both took distance with their backs to the waterfall.
"I guess you could say we've both taken one hit."
Armadel said that as he turned and there was a small rip in his coat at the shoulder. However, it was just the fabric that was damaged and there was not a trace of a cut on his skin.
"Bullshit."
Leon also turned around with ragged breaths.
Sting — he let out a pained breath without thinking at the severe pain that



I'm happy that he is still able to be my ideal even after all these years we've been apart.
I thought memories were beautified the more time passed.
I feared that the ideal I sought would one day be a mere skeleton of itsel
But that's wrong.
Just as I had imaginedno, there is a greatsword user even better than I had imagined right here.
Armadel Nestorius Ova.
Lord of Unusual Books Number One, 'Silver' Armadel.
"Because you have remained who you areI can become even stronger."

He gripped his sword with his powerless right arm and clamped down on his right hand with his left. In that instant, Leon did not miss the tiny fragment that broke off his sword tip.
Crumble.
A single crack ran down from the tip of his sword and split countless times as if forming a spiderweb until it covered the sword's body.
—So you can even break a greatsword covered in ice crystals.
He had gone past the point of awe and gone speechless. This greatsword had experienced countless battles and fought dozens of Yuugenshu without dulling in the slightest.
He's too far.
How do I catch up to my ideal?
Standing in his blurred vision, a greatsword user that looked basically the same as him.

Suddenly, he remembered the face of the Priestess who he served as a partner. Her sleek black hair and dainty build with a youthful face. Her face which was much more fearful than others.

".....Syun-rei."

Leon spoke that name knowing that it would not reach its recipient.

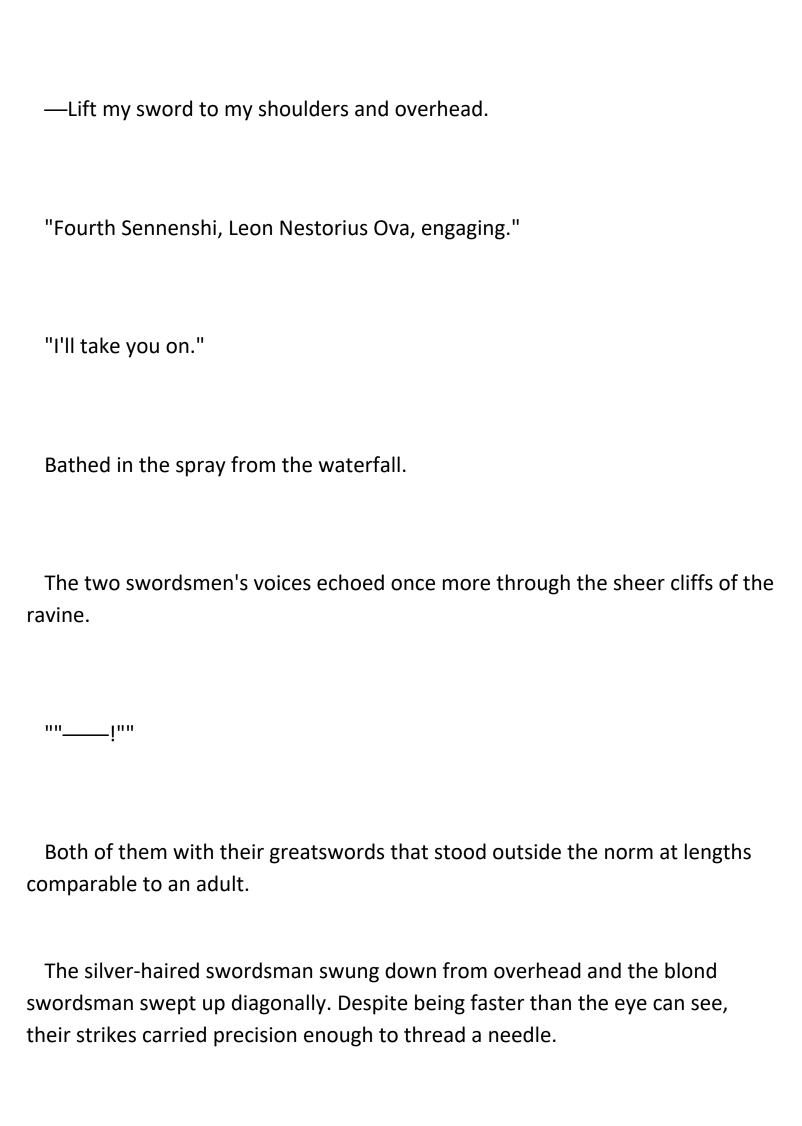
.....Was this how I appeared to you as well?

A Sennenshi is not allowed to lose.

But even beyond that, they were not allowed to leave their Priestesses in solitude. He might break one or both of those taboos now.

"Forgive me.....for this singular instance of selfishness in my life."

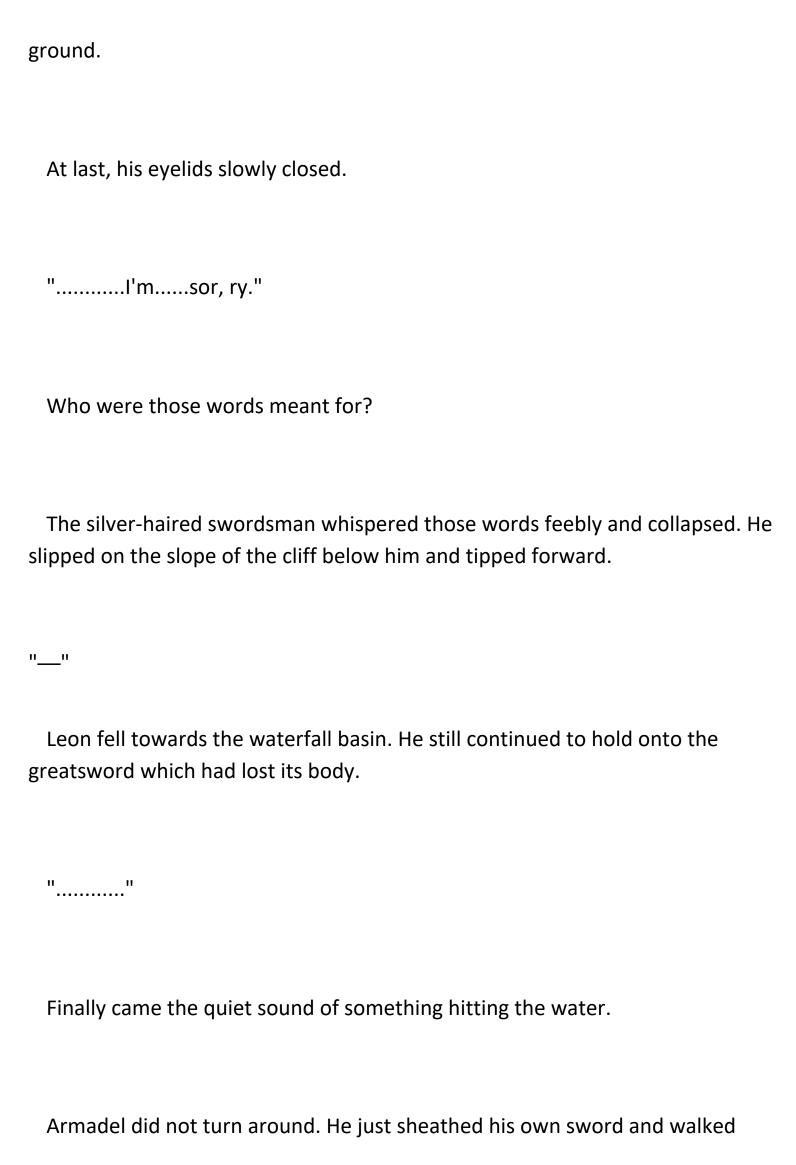
He let out a breath and stopped breathing. His spirit overcame his flesh and wiped away the fatigue; his resolve overcame his senses and nulled the pain from his elbow.



Slash.
The two swords which had become embodiments of slashes clashed head-on and passed each other by, leaving a slight reverberation.
II II
" "
Both the blond swordsman and silver-haired swordsman made not a quiver.
"Splendid."
Finally, a word carrying some measure of inflection left Armadel's lips.
"Your spirit and strength are both at the pinnacle with your sword skills. Truly fitting for one known as the protector of a Priestess."
Crimson droplets flowed along the sword's hilt. The laceration on Armadel's right shoulder was proof beyond anything else that Leon's sword had grazed his ideal.

"Bullshit."	
The other voice came from directly behind Armadel.	
Crackcrack	
The Sennenshi's voice overlapped with the sound of something cracking. At the same moment he stepped powerfully from his bent-over position to drathis sword that was stabbed into the ground—	
Kii, iiiiiiiiiiii, iiiiiiiiiinnn, nnn	
Just like ice shattering, his greatsword shattered into countless fragments with a perfectly clear sound.	
" " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "	

The Sennenshi watched the thousands of fragments dance through the air. His clothes were brutally torn from the left shoulder down to the right side of his torso and a great amount of blood flowed down his waist and dyed the



towards the edge of the ravine.
"I don't think you're a man that will die with just this much?"
Nobody was there in the ravine to hear him. That slight monologue mixed with the waterfall's splashing and disappeared.

Chapter 5 - Now We Meet

Part 1
Sophia, floor 287.
"No"
Ymy didn't know how to describe what she had seen.
The images she had seen in the nature district via clairvoyance. Even though there was no possibility of error, she couldn't accept what had happened immediately.
Leon
lostand fell
Suddenly, the images being sent became unclear.

'Ahhhh, ah.....ahhhh.....no,

Syun-rei, who was sitting beside her, opened her eyes wide and screamed.

"Syun-rei, Syun-rei, calm down! Syun-rei!?"

Even though Ymy hugged her around the shoulders, her body was stiff like iron and she didn't react. Tears flowed nonstop from her wide open eyes, staining her vestments. Her throat had been strained from screaming so it had ceased to be a scream anymore but she still wouldn't stop wailing.

'Ymy.'

"Meimel!?"

'Something major has to have happened for Syun-rei to be screaming like this.'

"Eh, does that mean—"

I'm not the only one hearing Syun-rei's cry? In this distressed state, she's broadcasting her telepathy as far as it will go?

'Ran's also getting it. I guess everybody in the tower can hear Syun-rei screaming. So make your report quick. What

happened?'
"U-umm"
Where do I start? Leon was supposed to be at Lagoon but suddenly appeared on Orbie Clar and fought with somebody that looked just like him
'Just state the conclusion. What happened to who?'
"Leon was badly wounded and fell into a waterfall basin."
'A waterfall basin? In Lagoon?'
There were few islands in Lagoon capable of housing a waterfall. In these desperate times, Meimel immediately caught onto that abnormality.
"Y-yes! Leon should have been at Lagoon but Syun-rei said he suddenly appeared on Orbie Clar. So we watched his battle"
'Where on Orbie Clar?'
"Syun-rei said it was the nature district's eastern area."
"Good work."

The telepathy ended and Meimel's voice came from her side. The
room's door slid aside and and a beautiful, tall Priestess quickly
moved into the living room.
"Knowing this much is plenty. Syun-rei, can you hear me?"
Her coworker was staring absently at the ceiling. She extended a
white hand to her cheeks—
"Syun-rei, listen to me. I'll be sending a rescue squad for Leon now."
"
"Leon's not dead for sure, right? There's no way he'd die."
II
"What you can do right now is send help as soon as possible."
Meimel cradled both Syun-rei cheeks and looked directly into her eyes.
"I'll order a party patrolling the nature district that's the closest to where Leon is. So tell me, where was Leon fighting?"
"Easternareaeighth ward. There was a

ravine.....and waterfall."

Eastern area, eighth ward.

It's probably the large waterfall at Mio Ravine that empties into the large river which continues into the Biotope. It's deep and flows fast so he could just keep going if we don't get him.

"We'll save him before he drifts into the Biotope. —Ran, can you hear me? Give out the order for a search at the base of Mio Ravine. Send out four medical squads with clairvoyants, combat squads and communications squads. Hurry."

".....That's great. Thank you, Meimel."

They had done what they could for now. They could only believe in Leon and the rescue squads now.

"Now then, could I hear what happened?"

Meimel took hold of Syun-rei's hands and pulled her up, then carried her to the sofa.

"I've heard what happened up until your clairvoyance was blocked.

What happened after? Why did Leon appear on Orbie Clar and who was he fighting with?"

"I.....don't know why he appeared on Orbie Clar. It really felt

like he just suddenly showed up."
"Was his opponent a Lord of Unusual Books?"
"Probably."
"I'll change my question. Do we still have no information on the other members?"
Right, that was the thing. Why did Leon appear on Orbie Clar? Maybe Sheltis and Horn have also
returned from Lagoon.
"I'll check."
Syun-rei whispered while reclined on the sofa.
"Okay. I would like to tell you not to push yourself but I have no choice this time. For now, check Orbie Clar via clairvoyance—"
Just before Meimel sighed.
'That is,Ymy and Ino relationyou're saying'
'To be,Edentruth itself was dis,
torted Youthree years a,
what'
—This is Shaltis' voice

It's not telepathy. Is it coming from the tower's speaker system?
"Is Sheltis back!?"
"No, this isn't coming from within the tower. Considering the noise in the transmissionit's a remote broadcast. From somewhere on the border of Orbie Clar."
Meimel had her arms folded as she glared as the speakers.
"I don't know why they're playing this but it's intentional. They're going to all this trouble for some reason."
II II
It's hardto breathe. Weighed down by a weight on her chest, Ymy leaned against the wall next to her and closed her eyes.
II II
What is this feeling? The voice that's playing together with Sheltis' It's high even for a tenor voice I feel like I've heard this voice before.

But I can't remember.

Have I heard this voice somewhere in the past?

Part 2

The faint smell of blood mixed with the smell of earth. ".....Now then." She slightly opened her eyes. A brown tree and brown earth. Before her eyes, several strange vines were hanging down and swaying gently.This wound is a bother. Looking down at the bullet wound in her left flank, Horn gingerly took a breath. This wound was inflicted by Beltoma's bullet. She had washed the wound out with disinfectant and wrapped bandages above a gauze to stop the bleeding. Even then, the bandage was slowly being dyed red. After settling the score with Beltoma, I should head back to the airship first. Or maybe I'll lose consciousness from excessive blood loss first. ".....I'm going to hate this from the bottom of my heart." 'I don't want to but I'll keep you company for a long fight.' That was just a bluff. Going for a drawn-out battle with this wound would be digging her own grave.But I had no choice but to say that back there. She had to disinfect her wound as quickly as possible. It would be

pointless if she died even if she managed to beat Beltoma in a

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gunfight.
She tossed the disinfectant bottle and once again gripped her SMG.
 She still had strength left. Her sole concern would be missing due
 to pain but she couldn't afford to worry about that.
.....'Dark Grey' Beltoma.
On top of his supersonic bullets, he also had shooting speed and
 precision. Quite honestly the personification of a gun.
With her SMG in one hand, she took a glance at the silver pistol in
 the holster on the left side of her waist.
Rusty Height — it fired special bullets that fragmented into
 twelve bullets upon discharge. Even Beltoma would be hard pressed
 to shoot all of them down if this was fired point blank.
".....No."
I doubt I can get that close against him with this wound. And Rusty
 Height is a pistol; it won't work for long-range sniping.
If I have to hit him—
"Long-range sniping. You need to snipe me from a distance where I
 won't notice.....right?"
—He found me first!?
"Kuh!"
Withstanding the intense pain, she twisted only the top half of her
  body. Still seated on the ground, she used just her upper arm
  muscles to hoist up her gun and aim behind her. She prepared to
  shoot and be shot at the same time.
".....He's gone?"
The slim man with a gun painted grey. He was nowhere in
  sight.
—Impossible, where did he go?
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He wasn't naive enough of an opponent to give up such an absolute advantage of an assault from behind. That he didn't attack instead brought her unease. The tension that stopped her breathing slowly spread throughout the forest......

The bushes to her side rustled with unnatural timing.

The bushes rustled and what first came into sight was a metal spear taller than an adult. Right behind it, a blonde woman poked her face out.

".....Ishtar?"

She sighed in an exaggerated way.

.....This is hard to swallow so suddenly.

This woman should be on standby at the tower. Why would she be at

Lagoon? And why is she here before me?

".....Are you the real Ishtar?"

The air suddenly froze over.

"If you think I'm not Ishtar, shall we have a battle here? You'll understand whether you like it or not."

"

The spear user standing there gave off a bottomless sense of intimidation. She glared at her eyes which gave off the feel of a

[&]quot;There!"

[&]quot;Nuuuuu. Wait, Horn-chan, hold, hold! We're allies, allies!"

[&]quot;.....Hah?"

[&]quot;Like, I, said. Aww, it can't be helped."

[&]quot;Yeah, yeah. Ahh, how scary. I thought I'd be shot by mistake."

[&]quot;Ehhh? Why are you doubting me?"

[&]quot;The real Ishtar shouldn't be here. If the one at the tower is the real one, then who the hell are you?"

[&]quot;—Then would you like to test it?"

fearless smile—

".....Fine."

With a small sigh, Horn lowered her gun.

- "I knew you'd understand, Horn-chan! Ishtar is so happy—"
- "I don't think there's anybody that can mimic that part of you."

As the woman writhed her body and raised a voice of praise, Horn truly sighed with all her spirit this time.

"Explain the circumstances briefly."

"Why Ishtar is here? Well, if I had to say, it was Meimel-sama's order."

"The Priestess'?"

Impossible. The one who told Ishtar to remain at the tower was Meimel herself to begin with.

"To fool you enemies, you must first fool your allies."

She casually tossed a change of bandages over.

"Ishtar got into the cargo hold of your airship sometime yesterday.

The reason none of you were told was as a countermeasure in the off-chance the third organization has a spy within the tower. No matter who the spy could be, it wouldn't be found out like this, right?"

They were led to believe she remained at the tower but she had instead tailed Horn of the detached unit.

As only she and Meimel were aware of this, there would be no way for a spy to know of it even if there was one.

"And what about that spy?"

"It looks like it was needless worry. —But just that is good enough."

Ishtar made a childish smile and stared at Horn's stomach.

"That's not like you. Are you having a hard time?"

".....You have bad tastes."

She finally understood. Before Beltoma could launch an assault from behind, he was assaulted by this spear user behind him.

"What about Beltoma?"

"He went somewhere. He said something like 'That's enough time' so I don't think he'll be back."

".....I'm being mocked."

She spat out a wad of blood and put her hand against a tree trunk.

She scolded herself for growing dizzy from the pain and blood loss and stood up while trembling all over.

.....Enough time?

.....So he only planned to block me from the start.

"Well, there's no need to beat yourself up so much!"

"What do you mean?"

"Beltoma was his name? When Ishtar got behind him, he didn't notice until she got really close. I think he had to stay focused with you as his opponent."

".....Whatever."

Ishtar held out her hand but Horn stopped her with her eyes and started walking.

"Where's your communicator?"

"It broke."

"So you were also attacked. Was it a Lord of Unusual Books?"

"No.....I wouldn't say it was them. It broke yesterday. It was my cute little sister though so I'll let it slide."

She sidestepped the question with a troubled expression that was rare for her.

"Horn-chan, do you know where the base is?"

"I've heard that much from the main unit. It's less than thirty minutes away from here.Just to note, don't leave me behind

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and go on ahead."

"Okay, okay."

Ishtar didn't even attempt to hide her wry smile as she looked up at the heavens.

"Then—"

'Horn-san!'

A Priestess' voice rang directly within the back of her head, wiping out Ishtar's.

"Ymy Ele Soufflenictole. There's been no communication for a while so I thought something happened."

'That was...... I-I'll tell you about it later! More important right now, Sheltis...... Did you already link up with the main unit!?'

"I was just about to head over. What happened?"

'Please.....quickly link up with the main unit and contact
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Sheltis. Tell him.....to stop. If you don't stop him soon, there

will be no turning back—'

Now we'll return about one hour prior. A summer breeze blew across the green land. 11___11 Holding down his billowing coat, Sheltis looked at the surroundings. "This is?" As far as he could see, it was an expansive prairie of deep green. A vast forest could be seen in the distance, bordering the field of rolling hills. "Do you remember this place?" ".....It resembles the place where 'Golden' Maha was protecting that water tank with a Yuugenshu in it." "That's it." Stab. Igun-I stabbed his twin needle-like swords into the ground and clapped. "It is exactly the place you fought at with Maha-san save for one thing. Look over there. Only the area over there has the grass torn up and the ground beneath exposed, right?" 1111 The earth that Igun-I indicated looked as if it had been gouged out with an explosion. He also remembered seeing those massive slabs of bedrock jutting out of the ground in several places. —What does this mean? I should be at Lagoon, far from Orbie Clar but somehow I've ended up in Orbie Clar's nature district before I realized it? ".....lgun-l."

"Yes, it is my handiwork. It is an ability that operates on yet another set of laws different from those of shinryoku arts...... To be more precise, it is a shinryoku art that advanced in a world without Yuugenshu."

A world without Yuugenshu?

"That kind of"

"Did you think Yuugenshu were prevalent throughout the entire world? That's not the case. Even within Eden, there are places in which Yuugenshu do not exist."

".....I don't believe you."

The world shrouded in deadly miasma.

Eden is a world overflowing with tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of Yuugenshu. That was common sense for anybody on Orbie Clar.

"My, my, how unlike you."

Beneath the black hat, Sheltis could tell there was a smile on his shapely face.

"You should understand, having fallen into Eden."

".....So it really was you."

The culprit behind contacting every terminal in Sophia and spreading information that a Yuugenshu assuming human form was lurking in the tower.

"Ahh, the message to the tower. It made it safely, I'm glad."

"Screw off!"

The land returned to silence.

"Why..... Why use such underhanded tricks?"

"You won't fool me. There's something else you'd rather ask."

"Don't hold back, I'm sure you have something you want to know more than that. Let's see, for example......'Why do you know that I

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fell into Eden!?'."
Shing. He rubbed the tips of his drawn swords together.
"Right, Sheltis!"
".....!"
The Lord of Unusual Books rotated his body like a spinning top and
 dodged the upward slash then swung down the sword opposite Sheltis'
 from diagonally above. After repelling that sword, Igun-I's
  movements didn't stop. As if having foreseen his defense
 beforehand, he warded off the force and closed in instantaneously
 with a kick off the ground.
.....He's fast!?
.....No, what's more concerning is.....those movements. It's as
 if.
"Just as I'd expect, even if you're shaken up, your body responds
 properly."
The black shadow went from being right up against the ground to
 standing in a heartbeat. Or so Sheltis thought, but he was suddenly
 hidden in his blind spot, connecting that into a sideways sweep
 with the might of a whirlwind.
—Even if he's blocked or dodged, he chains it into his next
  action.
—I have to stop him even if I have to force it a bit.
"Oh?"
"I'm done repelling."
He clashed with Igun-I's swords head-on. Sheltis glared at Igun-I
 as the four swords between them scraped against each other, raising
  shrill noises.
"Well done, but I suppose my moves were easy to read."
".....Why do you think so?"
"Because these are your movements from three years ago. I'm just
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copying them."

Eh?

"Oopsie-daisy. I just can't compete with you in arm strength. I'm as frail as I look."

.....What's going on?

.....It's true that Igun-I's movements were extremely easy to predict.

He could tell the timing attacks would come at and his body had responded naturally to the combos from just now.

"You look like you just chewed a bitter bug. But information of this degree is easily gathered through contact with Mikuva's Crimson Eye. It's nothing major."

That he had fallen into Eden. His swordplay from three years ago. I see, it really is easily available information. But why would he be so particular about me—

"Ah, before you misunderstand, I'll correct one thing. The information that can be obtained about you throug the 'Crimson Eye' is simply related to your dual swords. Your fall to Eden is unobtainable from the 'Crimson Eye'."

".....Eh?"

"The fact that you fell into Eden isn't recorded."

Mikuva's Crimson Eye.

A treasure of the Governmental Sector and massive shinryoku system which recorded all happenings within the world as images through the use of territory shinryoku arts. Even though that's what I've heard?

"Now that's the issue. You fell into Eden but Mikuva's Crimson Eye has no records of it. Which one is the truth in this case? That a boy by the name of Sheltis fell into Eden? Or that he

didn't?"

".....So I'm not proof enough?"

The mateki residing within my body itself is proof. This body can't touch Ymy and takes damage from shinryoku arts. It is the most solid evidence that I fell into Eden.

- —Clap, clap clap.
- "Splendid. Yes, that's right. That was what I wanted to hear."

Igun-I's claps resounded throughout the deep green meadow.

"But Sheltis, try remembering a little harder? How did you fall into Eden? More specifically, what were you doing just before you fell into Eden?"

"I was.....asked that many times at the tower."

But I couldn't answer. I don't remember. I have no recollection of anything from just before I fell into Eden to when I returned to Orbie Clar.

"Yes, and that is where the key to this contradiction lies. The contradiction between your truth and that of Mikuva's Crimson Eye."

The wind blew through the grasslands. His pale blond hair swaying beneath his black hat, the Lord of Unusual Books spread both arms.

"Sheltis Magna Yehle—

You were not the one who should have fallen to Eden.

That you would fall into Eden is an event that lay outside the purview of this world."

He gently, oh so gently conveyed his words as if to a child of his own.

Those words crossed over the plains, over the nature district, over

Orbie Clar and permeated to the ends of the world.

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- "What, did you see something strange? Was there a flying lizard or something?"
- "Nope-"
- Tsali said so teasingly and Eyriey shook her head then turned to look at the path they'd walked through.
- "I was just thinking that it's been smooth sailing this whole way."
- "Even though there were a bunch of a standalone mechanical soldiers?"
- "Ah, that's not what I meant..... Umm, I just thought we might have barely missed them."
- There were turns but it didn't branch off. She felt as if she'd walked a fair distance but they had yet to meet Sheltis or anybody else she knew.
- "C'mon, there was a single branch. It split off to the left and right and there was a large, fallen mechanical soldier off to the right side."
- "Ahh, that was a long while ago."
- "Yeahhh..... I wonder if it would've been better to pick the left route at that time. Right was out because that lug was clogging it up and it would be hard to pass by. What to to do?"
- They hadn't met up despite having traveled this far. Even if there was a room ahead of this, she felt that the chances of everybody being there were low.
- "I am Eyriey-nee's escort. I'll go with you where you want to

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go."
Tsali gave her okay with her hand on Eyriey's head.
"But we're strapped for time. If we're turning back, you need to
 make the call fast."
"Hmmmm, then let's turn—"
Just before she was about to grab Tsali's hand and change
  directions.
'Ahh! Onee-chan, wait, wait!'
'You came all this way so come play. We've been
  waiting all this time.....'
"Heh?"
Two voices echoed directly within her head like music played
 through earphones. These innocent, youthful voices.....whose are
 they?
'It's just a little further so keep going!'
'Just go ten meters more and turn the corner!'
Hrm, what to do.
It's not Sheltis' group so I could just ignore them. But they might
 know where to go. And they've gone to the trouble of asking me to
  'come' so I don't really want to refuse.
"Alright, I'll go, I'll go. So Tsali-san, they said it's just
  around that corner."
"So you're changing plans again from heading back."
She took the hand of her escort who was wearing a forced smile and
 started walking. Just like the twins', or so it seemed, voices
 said, there was certainly a corner just ahead of them. She could
 also see a slightly strong light coming from there.
.....Ummm, they said we just had to turn and head straight.
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Gigantic double doors.

The crimson metal door gave off a strange pressure just by looking up at it.

".....What a large door. And it's closed."

"Now, now, little twins, I could force it open but what would you have me do?"

Tsali had one eye closed and looked to be enjoying herself.

'Ahh, no violence. That's no good.'

'Yeah, that's no good. We'll open it now so just wait a second.'

They waited several seconds.

The face of the crimson door was became bathed in glittering particles of blue and green.

"Ohhh, how pretty."

"The blue is barrier type shinryoku and the green is territory type. By the way, the red for the door might be reminiscent of baptism types. All three of them are essential in battles against Yuugenshu."

Tsuli said so while combing the hair next to her ear.

Then—

'Welcome, onee-chan, onee-san.'

'To our base, the base of The Lords of Unusual Books. We shall guide you two.'

An enormous lab lay on the other side of the open door.

A pair of twins submersed in solution within water tanks were there.

'I am Neue. I'm in the blue water tank and I'm Noesis' younger brother.'

'I am Noesis. I'm in the green water tank and I'm Neue's older sister.'

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Each of the twins had their eyes shut within the water tanks. Their
 hair colors.....couldn't be ascertained because of the solutions'
 colors but they were slightly taller than Yuto. They looked to be
  about ten years old.
"Ohh, so polite. My name is Eyriey and the tall lady behind me is
 Tsali-san."
'We know. Tsali-san was calling you Eyri-nee.'
'Eyri-nee. Yup, it's a good name. Can I call you that
 too?'
"Sure, sure..... What's wrong, Tsali-san?"
She looked to her side and saw Tsali-san seemingly puffing her
 cheeks.
".....It's nothing. I'm not pouting at all."
"Okay?"
".....Really...... The only one allowed to call Eyri-nee by
 Eyri-nee is......Yuto only....."
"Tsali-san, did you say something?"
"No, more importantly—"
The person in question cleared her throat as if nothing had
 happened.
"Eyri-nee, didn't you have something to ask these two?"
"Ah, right, right! Hey, hey, I'm looking for somebody called
 Sheltis and wanted to ask if you know anything? I think he should
  be somewhere in this facility."
'Sheltis. Ahh, the boy that Igun-I really likes. Hrmm..... He
 might not be in this base. I think he might have left
 Lagoon.'
'Yeah, he left. I think he's returned to Orbie Clar.'
"Orbie Clar..... Wait, Orbie Clar?"
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The continent with Sophia towering over it came to mind and Eyriey

tilted her head in wonder.

It took several hours by airship so just when did he go?

"And wait, you mean Sheltis just went back ahead of us on his own?"

'Nope, Igun-I went with him.'

'Yeah, he went with him. He said he wanted to speak with him alone so I think Igun-I used some weird art to move to Orbie Clar.

Also, Armadel is missing.'

'Eyri-nee, do you know a man called Leon? That person is also missing from this base.'

".....Ugh, what's with that!"

She screamed out before thinking. Even though she'd worked up the courage and come out here, neither Sheltis nor Leon were here so there was no point.

"Wait a second, wait a second, lemme confirm. I don't know how but Sheltis and Leon went back to Orbie Clar. The ones still here at Lagoon are me, Tsali-san, Yuto and....."

'Two officials from the Governmental Sector and a lady with a blindfold.'

'Also, a spear-wielding lady showed up sometime.'

"Hm-hm. A spear-wielding lady...... I don't know who that is but okay. Hey, Tsali-san, what should we do?"

"Wouldn't it be a good time to pull back?"

The woman seemed indifferent as she looked over the room.

"I've already confirmed Shel-nii isn't here in Lagoon just like those twins said."

"Shel-nii?"

".....My mistake.Ahem. But before we return, I'd like to ask a few things first. There's no way you're trying to live in seclusion by building this cave-like facility out in the middle of

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nowhere, right?"
Tsali briskly walked up to the twins' water tanks.
"It's that 'Layered World Project' of yours."
'Arere? So you know about that. Then maybe we can talk about
 it.'
'Yeah, I think it's fine. It's only restricted for people from
 Sophia or the Governmental Sector. Eyri-nee doesn't seem to be from
 either and Tsali-san looks like she already knows.'
Layered World Project.
What is this thing I've never heard of?
'Look, Neue, Eyri-nee's confused.'
'Yeah, she's confused. —Then before we explain, look over here.
 It's the all-important first reveal of our country. This is a
 special just for you, okay?'
Kusukusu, kusukusukusu......
The twins' voices echoed together with the sound of bubbles
 popping. Immediately afterwards, the imposing sound of a machine
 starting up resounded throughout the area.
"The wall is!?"
The wall just behind the twins' water tanks began to sink into the
 floor and the space behind it slowly came into view.
"Eyri-nee, you should back up a little. It might be too much of a
 shock if you're this close."
"What do you mean?"
Her hand was grabbed by her escort and she was dragged right up to
 the wall. During that time, the wall continued to descend and a
 dimly lit room came into view. A single small water tank was in
 there all by its lonesome.
'This is the beginning of the 'Layered World
 Project'.'
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The light reached into that dim space. When the contents of the water tank were lit up—
"!......Th......That......"
She scraped out her voice but no words would form. She was seeing it from a distance but that dark purple beast.....
The third water tank that had appeared.
Eyriey was speechless as she was faced with that water tank which was cultivating a Yuugenshu.

'The beginning and the most important component.'

"You are not the one who should have fallen to Eden. You are not the qualified person that Eden seeks."

".....I don't get what you mean."

"I expected you to say that so I have also prepared a different explanation."

Meticulously stretching his glove to remove the wrinkles, Igun-I pointed down at his feet.

"Eden — At times, there are people that fall down there by accident but the incident I speak of is not so. They are a qualified individual which was chosen by Eden and beckoned." "Oualified individual?"

"Yes, I believe you have heard of this before. The activation of 'Mikuva's Crimson Eye' also used the term. In this case, it's Eden..... To be more precise, it's the entity that sleeps deep within Eden who has chosen."

One short pause.

After a fractional period which was not enough time for neither a breath nor reverberation of his words, Igun-I continued.

"The person chosen by the Forbidden Crystal."

"! That.....?"

"Yes. I don't plan to speak in detail of the Forbidden Crystal here but if I had to summarize, it's like the core of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. It delved into the depths of Eden itself and sealed Eden. You can think of the Forbidden Crystal as such."

.....So I wasn't mistaken.

In the underground facility he'd gone to with Leon, there was an

image of a girl. That girl which had talked to him was—
"Wait..... So you're saying the Forbidden Crystal.....beckoned somebody?"

The person summoned by the Forbidden Crystal would fall to Eden.

But he who had fallen to Eden was not the correct person?

Childishness that was short of being malice. With childish speech that betrayed no ill will, the Lord of Unusual Books continued.

Igun-I's lonely, sad whisper was penetrating.

"Sheltis, remember.

Three years ago, you were an Elite Guard and you fell into Eden instead of Ymy when you protected her."

[&]quot;Do you want to know who is the correct person?"

[&]quot;.....Not if you're not planning to say."

[&]quot;Fufu, I'm joking. I just wanted to tease you."

[&]quot;The qualified person's name is Ymy Ele Soufflenictole."

[&]quot;That's right. She is the qualified person chosen by the Forbidden Crystal. As the successor to the previous qualified person of one thousand years ago, Shasa Endens Lin Kale, she should have received the power of the Forbidden Crystal. But that requires her to come into direct contact with the Forbidden Crystal. As such, she would have to fall once into Eden where it awaits."

[&]quot;

[&]quot;It looks like you can't believe it."

[&]quot;It would be stranger to. If Ymy is the qualified person, then she

should have fallen into Eden by now, right?"

[&]quot;Yes, that's right.Sheltis, you really have forgotten everything."

—Crack.

In that instant, something deep within his chest gave off a sound and cracked.

"Three years ago.....the girl, who was an apprentice Priestess, arrived at a 'certain place' and should have fallen as ordained by the Forbidden Crystal. She would contact the Forbidden Crystal, house its power and once again rise back to Orbie Clar."

11 11

"The girl began to fall. Everything was as the Forbidden Crystal had planned.

However.....this is when something that was not intended occurred.

While the girl had gone to this 'certain place', a boy had stealthily followed her. It was her childhood friend who was worried about the girl."

Those were distant, forgotten memories.

But little by little.....just like the snow covering the land melts away, the events of 'that time' returned as images in a flashback.

"She would fall to Eden and contact the Forbidden Crystal — but there was no way the childhood friend would know this truth which not even the girl herself knew. The girl falling to Eden looked no different than the other common incidents of falling into Eden. The next action the boy took...... I believe it need not be said."

The boy threw himself into Eden to save the girl who was falling.

[&]quot;.....And you're saying that was Ymy and me?"

Igun-I didn't answer.

But the lonely smile upon his lips spoke of the truth more clearly than any answer.

"The boy who jumped into Eden was assaulted by mateki but even then took the girl's hand...... In the end, he succeeded in her rescue and sent her 'up'. But the boy had no strength for his own return remaining. That is the truth of three years ago which no one remembers."

The girl remained on Orbie Clar.

The boy who had exhausted his strength fell to Eden.

"In the Sacred Hall of the Governmental Sector, I said this to you.

Mikuva's Crimson Eye is a replica of the original, the Forbidden Crystal. All that Mikuva's Crimson Eye records is also committed to memory by the Forbidden Crystal. However, because it is a replica, even if it an record events in this world, it cannot record those within Eden. With that as the case, do you understand?"

[T/N: Sacred Hall used to be Holy Hall but that sounds bad.]

"The event of 'Ymy Ele Soufflenictole fell to

Eden' that the Forbidden Crystal ordained was eliminated and the event that should not have happened of 'Sheltis Magna Yehle fell to Eden' occurred."

The Forbidden Crystal which lay in the deepest part of Eden saw the falling boy and perceived that event. On the other hand, Mikuva's Crimson Eye which was fixated in the Governmental Sector could not record that.

"The world's memory was distorted. Unaffected by the boy who fell

to Eden's existence, Mikuva's Crimson Eye which records the events of this world had no way to know. To be rid of this contradiction, the Forbidden Crystal came up with a plan."

"—! That..... That's a fabrication?"

That was what Ymy, Leon and even Sheltis himself remembered. He had fallen to Eden while patrolling the Biotope — everybody should remember it as such.

.....I can't believe it.

.....Though I.....really have nothing but muddled memories myself.

"But that isn't really necessary, right!? It would be fine if it just let Mikuva's Crimson Eye record that I had fallen into Eden!"

"That's the natural doubt to have. And of course, there was a reason the Forbidden Crystal would spread false information to the world through Mikuva's Crimson Eye."

Hand pressed down on the rim of his hat, Igun-I's words held no unevenness.

"It was the place. I used the vague description of a 'certain place' just now to describe where the two childhood friends went. In other words, the place you fell into Eden from is the issue."

[&]quot;A plan....."

[&]quot;It would make the 'Crimson Eye' record a fabricated story where 'Sheltis Magna Yehle fell off the edge of Orbie Clar and into Eden while patrolling the Biotope' and pass that off as the truth of the world."

[&]quot;.....So you're saying it wasn't the Biotope?"

[&]quot;Where do you think it was?"

If his falling into Eden from the Biotope was not the truth, then that would mean the place being Biotope was the falsity.

But nothing readily came to mind. Maybe someplace in Lagoon?

"It's a place you know well. Come now, though you can't see it from here."

The pitch black Lord of Unusual Books pointed far into the distance.

Towards the living districts which were far from the nature districts.

"It was Sophia.

You and Ymy fell to Eden from the top floor of that tower."

Those words had surpassed his understanding.

".....So.....Sophia?"

"Now isn't that the face of speechlessness? If you don't understand, try to remember the top floor of the tower. What is the top floor of Sophia known as?"

The top floor of the tower was floor 291.

It was known as 'Paradise' and he had heard it was connected to the

Queen and Priestesses' prayers for Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

"Do you know how many floors there are in Sophia?"

".....291. That's obvious."

"That's right. But isn't that strange? It's such an odd number to stop at. In creating a massive structure like Sophia, to make it easier to keep in mind the whole thing, it would be common sense to simplify everything to the extreme. For example......yes, adding another nine floors to make it 300 would be good? It's a very clean number."

".....Where are you going with this hypothetical story?"

Everybody on Orbie Clar knew of the peculiarity of the tower's floor numbering. But complaining about that now was pointless.

"Ahh, right, right. If we're talking about having nine floors—"

Beneath his hat, his shapely lips curled up.

"Eden happens to be exactly nine floors."

".....!?"

Somewhere deep within his memories—

'Welcome, you who have fallen to Eden and returned to Orbie
Clar. The Paradise which has been frozen for a thousand years was
awaiting you.'

'I just want to ask you one thing. How far into Eden did you fall? The fifth or sixth surface? Or did you hear 'that song' which flows within the deepest parts?'

[T/N: Unusual counter for floors. It uses "mirror surfaces", implying that the floors are being counted in the opposite order.]

.....I remember the sound of falling rain.

.....There was a woman who held her hand out to me within my greyed-out vision.

"If you add together Sophia's 291 floors and Eden's 9, you get a clean 300 floors. Like this, you could say it was a tidy construction. If so, wouldn't it be natural to think they were set to be such in the first place?"

".....What are you trying to say?"

"It's a mirror. Sophia and Eden. Going further, Orbie Clar and Eden are mirror images on opposite sides of the mirror called Hyouketsu

Kyoukai."

The Lord of Unusual Books spread his arms widely and looked up at the heavens.

That posture looked as if he was trying to embrace the blue skies.

"Because it is a reflection, the highest becomes the lowest and the lowest becomes the highest — You understand now, right? Sophia's highest floor is Eden's deepest. Within the tower's 291st floor, 'Paradise', there exists an invisible door which connects to Eden.

And....."

Ana.....

"Yes. With this, you also understand why the prayers for Hyouketsu Kyoukai are done at the highest floor, correct? The Queen and Priestesses are constantly activating the barrier from the location closest to Eden. Activating a barrier from closer up is guaranteed to be more effective."

.....I didn't know.

No, nobody knew. Not the Elite Guards, nor the instructors and probably not even the Sennenshi. The art of Hyouketsu Kyoukai should be a secret of the utmost importance circulated only between the Queen and the Priestesses.

"Ahh, by the way, not even the Priestesses know of this. That the tower and Eden are connected."

".....So not even the Priestesses know."

"Only three people do. Only those who contacted the Forbidden Crystal a thousand years ago. Amongst them in one man and two women."

[&]quot;.....Ymy and I fell to Eden from there."

[&]quot;Are you one of them?"

[&]quot;No, I am no one that important. I am an exception."

The tone of Lord of Unusual Books changed as he said that.

Despite knowing things beyond the ordinary, he took no pride in it.

Instead, he seemed to be embarrassed of the fact as he tightened his lips together and readjusted his hat over his eyes.

The top floor of the tower was connected to Eden and that's where Hyouketsu Kyoukai was established.

If the masses of Orbie Clar knew of this, it would cause a great stir, and that was still within acceptable limits. The problem was the Yuugenshu. If those monsters knew the secret of Hyouketsu Kyoukai, that might become the cause for another weakness in Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

"And so you fell into Eden without knowing the truth and only the result of your harboring mateki was left within the world." Igun-I pointed his finger straight at Sheltis.

"That is also the reason you survived falling into Eden. In exchange of Ymy who should have received the Forbidden Crystal's power, you were granted the protection of the Forbidden Crystal which was for 'returning to Orbie Clar once more'. But because you were not qualified, you could not be given the Forbidden Crystal's power and it took time for you to rise back up to Orbie Clar."

That was the one year.

.....And that's why I have no memory of my time in Eden.

While he was in Eden, he remained outside the purview of Mikuva's Crimson Eye. Because of the efforts of the Forbidden Crystal,

[&]quot;At any rate, you understand now, right?"

[&]quot;So this is the reason the Forbidden Crystal operated Mikuva's Crimson Eye....."

[&]quot;Yes. I suppose you could say it was panicked."

```
placeholder memories of him 'falling from the Biotope' hid
 it.
"How about it?"
".....I still don't know which to believe."
But I know. This Lord of Unusual Books is not lying. I can feel
 that everything he has said is the truth.
"But I think that you.....are not lying."
"Then that's good."
He smiled and then.
"Rather than not knowing anything, I would rather you despair after
 knowing everything."
The pitch black Lord of Unusual Books declared with wholehearted
 joy.
"....!"
"Whoa now, don't be in such a panic. Everything I have explained is
 the truth. There are no embellishments to it."
Igun-I raised a hand to stop his reflexive tensing.
"I.....didn't believe that you would just explain this for no
 reason. Say it already! What's your purpose?"
Even after hearing all he'd said until now, he still did not have a
 grasp on Igun-I's objective.
Is it a diversion or is he buying time? But I don't see a point to
  buying time at the edge of a grasslands like this. Even if this was
 a distraction, he's being too honest.
"You will understand eventually. Yes..... It's almost time.....
 You will understand soon."
The Lord of Unusual Books draw his swords out from the ground. Not
  a fleck of earth was stuck onto those needle-like swords.
"Now then, let us enjoy our alone time for a while
 longer."
```

Bright lights shone down from above in the room.

A multitude of cables snaked along the ground haphazardly and connected into varying sizes of machines which were painted all black.

But she wasn't concerned about any of that—'Aha, Eyri-nee, are you surprised? But that's natural.'

'Yeah, yeah, it's natural. If a normal person sees a Yuugenshu, they get surprised.'

"—H-hey! I'm not surprised at all!"

Eyriey shouted out without thinking and took a step back. She clutched onto Tsali's clothing beside her and timidly leered at the interior of the water tank.

"H-hey, Tsali-san. Is..... Is that a Yuugenshu?"

"That's right."

She nodded as that's what it was. There was not a shred of unease in her.

.....I guess a Yuugenshu's nothing to her since she's a Guard.

.....I'm just not comfortable with Yuugenshu and only them. I have nothing but scary memories of them.

It was the same thing when she went on that barbecue with Sheltis and Yuto and when Sophia came under attack by a large group of them. For she who could not use shinryoku, there was almost nothing she could do to resist them. Most of the people on Orbie Clar were the same and even within the tower, only the Guards and Priestesses were exceptions.

[&]quot;Eyri-nee, are you scared?"

- ".....Yeah. Only Yuugenshu do this. I don't know when it might attack after all."
- "That's the correct thinking. But that concern doesn't seem to be warranted this time."
- "Eh?"
- "There are two reasons the Yuugenshu before us is not to be feared.

The first is that a single Yuugenshu or two aren't even enough to count as killing time against me, a simple matter of strength. The other is that there is practically no mateki coming from the water tank over there."

Narrowing her eyes to slits, Tsali glared at the water tank.

- "Eyri-nee, what does that water tank look like to you?"
- ".....Isn't it a breeding tank? There are bubbles rising up from the bottom."
- "That's right, there are similar apparatuses in Sophia as well..... I see, if you look at reality, it's immediately obvious."

Her eyes were smiling combatively in a way that clearly suited a grin.

[T/N: It's actually an onomatopoeia for smiling (niyari) that we don't have an equivalent for in English. The SFX is suited to a smile that is not friendly by any stretch of the imagination.]

"Breeding as a word is only partially correct. The goal does not appear to be breeding itself."

"Eh?"

"If they just stuck it in a water tank, the Yuugenshu would grow in size and spread mateki. But what about that? It doesn't have the mateki mist and it's not moving even a bit."

```
"That's true....."
Even if it was being bred in the water tank, it was unnaturally
 still. Its movements were stopped as if it was asleep.
"Their goal is an experimental barrier to seal away Yuugenshu
 through sleep. It looks like they're breeding Yuugenshu because
 that's a necessary step in their experiments."
'.....Uwah.'
'.....Wooow.'
Mixed into the twins' voices was awe at the sage before them.
"So this is the 'Layered World Project'?"
'That's right. Our final goal is an eternal world.'
'Yeah, it's amazing. If this is completed, we won't need the
  Queen or Priestesses. We can make Orbie Clar an eternal paradise in
 place of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. The 'will of the world' said so. If
 this barrier is completed, Orbie Clar will transform from a false
 paradise into a real one. We Lords of Unusual Books will end this
 illusionary paradise.'
".....Illusionary paradise, huh."
Closing her eyes, Tsali ruminated over the twins' words.
"But that could also be considered to not be much of a difference
 to Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Isn't it just a difference of whether the
 Priestesses are maintaining the barrier or you two?"
'Hyouketsu Kyoukai won't hold much longer.'
'Yeah, it's at its limit. The Forbidden Crystal's power is
 basically used up. Ymy Ele Soufflenictole who should have been the
 final qualified person also didn't fall into Eden and failed to
 contact the Forbidden Crystal, extinguishing the final
 hope.'
.....Ymy?
```

"Eh? W-wait a second. What's this about Ymy falling into Eden — mngh!?"

"I see, I've got the gist of it."

She tried to say something but had her mouth covered by the Guard beside her.

"Eyri-nee, let's head back."

"Fuguu!?"

"I've already asked all I wanted to. And it seems there are Lords of Unusual Books heading towards our airship."

'Ah, she found out.'

'She found out-'

Kusukusu. Innocent malice could be felt in their telepathic communications.

"Your older sister here will teach you kids something."

With her back towards the twins, Tsali turned just her head to face them sideways.

"Shasa's..... No, the Queen's strength is not in Hyouketsu Kyoukai nor the Forbidden Crystal. It is the unwavering 'will of the people' that has persisted a thousand years. A true paradise is not a place, it is the succession of that will."

'? Neue doesn't understand.'

'? Noesis doesn't understand.'

She returned a slight smile to the twins floating in their water

tanks—

Immediately after.

Tsali picked Eyriey up and disappeared from the room.

The murderous heat rays poured down mercilessly upon the sandy soil.

When there was no wind, the temperature would even get up to fifty degrees. Long periods of training in such an environment presented an extreme burden on both the body and mind. For Cadet Guards, even in independent training, it was an ironclad rule to be in a group of two or more.

"Even then.....why do I gotta pair with you?"

"Sheltis is not here. Monica said she would go buy the squad's emergency rations. I think she'll be back soon."

Vaiel continued his squats and Kagura was riding his shoulders as she looked down at him.

"You don't like being together with me?"

"Always the same shit..... Oww! Bitch, don't go slappin' my head!"

"Come on, focus. But I'm insufficient as a weight. We need a Guard with a little more body weight."

She looked around with her helmet on her head.

It was easy to see around her because she was on his shoulders but because it was the hottest time of day, it looked like all the other groups had taken cover in the shade beneath the trees.

"You think I'm gonna carry some damned fat ass in this damned heat?

Hey, how much more?"

"Another nineteen times. After that appears to be conquering a full marathon while handstanding."

".....What kind of joke is that?"

"It looks like it's one of the new menus that Instructor Yumelda came up with by staying up all night. It appears to have come into effect yesterday but there have unfortunately been no successes thus far."

"___"

He just silently continued his squats. From his exasperated expression, he seemed to have lost the will to respond.

- "Still, how rare of you to participate in independent training of your own free will."
- "It's 'cause our cap'n there's in strangely high spirits. Thanks to that, the Instructor comes to beat my ass if I'm dozing and tells me to come to training if I'm so free...... It's a crying tragedy."
- "It's because Monica's also worked up."
-Being excluded from the mission Sheltis is on must have been that hard on her.
- The twin swords user that became Monica's impetus for becoming a Guard fell to Eden three years ago and was declared KIA. However, he had actually lived and that was Sheltis. The only one who knew that within the squad was Kagura.
-Of course he resembles that Guard since he is that person.
- Kagura was of course aware of the complicated feelings Monica held for Sheltis. But she couldn't tell her the truth. If she were to tell her, Monica would probably.....be happy but also receive a big shock.
- "Somehow or other, that might be a cause for worry within our squad."

```
"You say something?"
"No, no, nothing at all. Rather than that, after this is—"
Another five times.
Just before Kagura said that.
  'Why are you—'
'I shall tell you everything. That which you want to know and
 that which you do not, in its entirety, plain and simple. That is
  why I am here.'
This unusual phenomenon suddenly occurred at the
 tower.
".....Eh?"
Was that my imagination? A voice I know just came from the tower's
 speakers—
'Do you remember this place?'
'.....It resembles the place 'Golden' Maha was protecting that
 water tank with a Yuugenshu in it.'
'It is exactly the place you fought at with
 Maha-san save for one thing. Look over there. Only the area over
 there has the grass torn up and the ground beneath exposed,
 right?'
Maha? A water tank with a Yuugenshu in it?
What's going on? Why can I hear Sheltis' voice from the tower's
 speakers..... And who is he speaking with?
"Oi, oi, that bastard's back at the tower?"
Vaiel also raised his head while wiping off his sweat.
There was no mistake that he was also hearing this. This voice was
 Sheltis' and it was coming from the tower's speakers.
"I wonder who he's talking to."
```

That was what she was curious about. Considering that Maha's name had come up, it was somebody related to the Lords of Unusual Books. The person Sheltis was talking to should not be some random civilian.

'Did you think Yuugenshu were prevalent throughout the entire world? That's not the case. Even within Eden, there are places in which Yuugenshu do not exist.'

'.....I don't believe you.'

—What is this tone of Sheltis'?

He was showing anger far removed from his normal self in his words..... No, is this impatience? A feeling of unease with strong intonation. This isn't the kind of feeling you'd give off if you were talking to an ally. It's highly likely that he's talking to an enemy from the place he was infiltrating.

During this time, the conversation between the two continued to play through the speakers—

'You should understand, having fallen into Eden.' '.....So it really was you.'

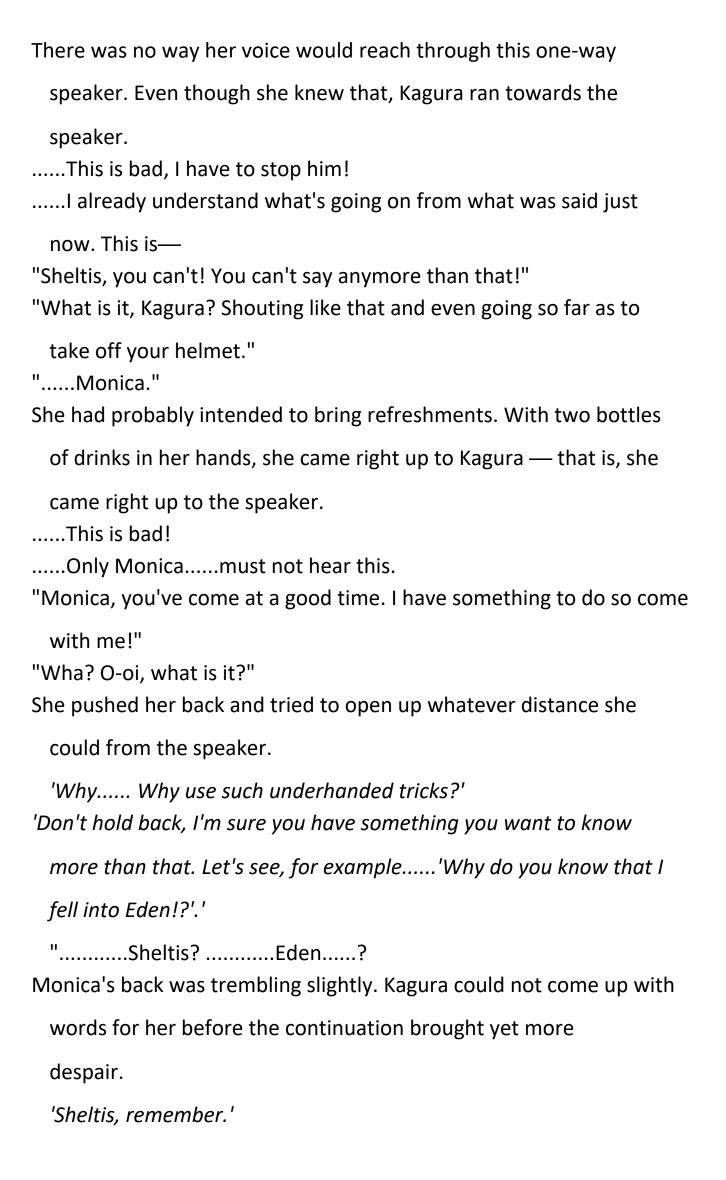
'Ahh, the message to the tower. It made it safely, I'm glad.'

".....Mm. Eden? The message to the tower?" Vaiel scrunched his face in puzzlement and she looked at that reaction of his.

—So that's what this is!

Chills enough to make her shiver accompanied a single premonition that popped up in her head.

"Sheltis!"



'Three years ago, you were an Elite Guard and you fell into Eden instead of Ymy when you protected her.'

The speaker's voice quietly, quietly yet rejecting all interference, spread through the tower.

What started as a small commotion grew larger with every passing moment.

```
—Shing!
The beautiful reverberation of a sword. Before that sound finished,
 another one rang out and the cascading resonance became an odd sort
 of song.
"Kuh.....!"
"Whoopsie, that was close."
Igun-I dodged just before Sheltis' sword tore through the tip of
  his hat. The backhand blow he deliverd to Igun-I's landing point
 was also stopped and instead, he barely managed to defend against
 the down-up sweep from his side.
"Your breathing is getting quicker. Is it fatigue or perhaps
 impatience?"
11 .....11
He paid no attention to those words and launched a kick at Igun-I's
 chin below him.
Tchch — a sharp sound could be heard but his boot only managed to
 slightly sway some of his opponent's blond hair. As if his action
  had been read, he was dodged by a hair's breadth.
"Ohh, close again."
My attacks aren't landing.
.....What's going on? Why does it feel like something doesn't add
 up?
11___11
He didn't understand Igun-I's degree of skill.
He could reproduce Sheltis' sword skills from three years ago, just
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before he had fallen to Eden. He really did have a sense of having

seen each and every one of these movements with their tendencies and the combinations of them. That's why it was a given that he would also be able to avoid Igun-I's attacks.

.....But why am I not able to land my own attacks?

Now that he had grown taller and gained more muscle, his swordplay had changed forms from the core. There should be no way Igun-I would be able to read his attacks by replicating him from three years ago.

"I'm happy."

The Lord of Unusual Books had perfectly level breathing and whispered in a tone overcome with emotion.

"You understand deep within your heart. Who I am."

".....I understand who you are?"

"Yes. You are subconsciously making your attacks miss. That is the reason your attacks aren't landing."

Putting a hand to his chest, Igun-I continued.

"For I am the most important person to you."

".....What did you say!"

"It's true, you know? Since you don't know what I look like

beneath my hat."

He pinched the corner of his hat between his fingertips.

"But you can't look. I won't show you yet. Figuring out who I am will have to wait until everything is over."

"—Jokes should be kept in moderation!"

"Ohh, close again."

He swung down from overhead and his opponent swung up while backing up. But even though he had pretty much perfectly directed his attention above, the combined attack from below didn't hit.

.....I'm making my attacks miss subconsciously?

.....That shouldn't.....be the case.

```
"Who you are is of no concern to me."
"Why would that be?"
".....I made a promise to somebody."
"That would be Ymy Ele Soufflenictole?"
He didn't feel any surprise at his promise with Ymy being known.
 For somebody who knew truths that neither Ymy nor he knew despite
 being those involved, he was prepared for anything to be
  known.
"I also feel that it is a beautiful thing."
The smile upon his lips had disappeared at some point and the Lord
  of Unusual Books' tone was serious as he said that.
"Ymy would become a Priestess protecting Orbie Clar and you would
 protect her from Yuugenshu. You would go on to become a Sennenshi
 and protect her. That was the promise."
"And what of it?"
"Fufu."
It was a lively voice which even gave off the impression of deep
  affection.
"Ahh, how rude of me. I just thought you really do treasure her.
 I'm sure you treasure others as well but she alone is
 special."
".....She's just a childhood friend."
"You don't have to be embarrassed. I think that simplicity of yours
 is good. That's why....."
Igun-I took something out of his pocket.
  "I will destroy all those precious relationships around
 you."
 A black box. Red and green lamps flashed consecutively.
"17"
"It's nothing dangerous so be at ease. It's just a listening
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device. But I don't need this anymore. It has already been more than helpful."

Igun-I threw the device into the air and split it into two perfect halves.

".....A listening device."

"Yes. You didn't realize that none of the conversation from just now was focused around me?"

Igun-I pointed his index finger at the heavens.

"I've taken the liberty of extracting only the convenient parts of our conversation and broadcasting it. Now here's the question: where did I broadcast it to?"

".....You're kidding."

Cold sweat flowed down his face and onto the ground.

Considering Igun-I's mail that was sent several days ago to every corner of the tower, it was a foregone conclusion. As much as he thought, the worst answer was—

"I've forcefully broadcasted our conversation just now to every floor of the tower."

Igun-I's shoulders shook as he laughed innocently.

"Arara, how terrible. It looks like your past, your relationship with Ymy and every secret you wished to keep hidden has been exposed to everybody?"

```
'Sheltis, remember.'
'Three years ago, you were an Elite Guard and you fell into Eden
 instead of Ymy when you protected her.'
 Sophia floor 33, the Regular Guard training floor.
11 .....11
Leaving the four iron balls she was controlling stalled in the air,
 I'sa Ish Ismael wordlessly listened to the voices coming from the
 speaker.
".....An Elite Guard."
The bald dual gunner that came up to her only muttered that single
  phrase.
"So that's why his ability was beyond a Cadet Guard."
".....Hey, Jin."
Her face remained downcast as I'sa unconsciously clenched her
 fists.
"Do you think onee-sama.....knew about this?"
"Who knows. But she's also an Elite Guard so I don't think you can
 say she didn't know for sure."
".....Right."
She bit down on the inside of her cheek.
—That dual swordsman is an Elite Guard? And the childhood friend
 of Ymy-sama?
.....No, more importantly.....he fell into Eden?
.....So a person who fell into Eden has come back to Orbie
 Clar.
"What should we do?"
"We won't do anything. We just wait for orders from above."
```

She recalled her iron balls back to her side.

I'sa looked unblinkingly at the roof of the floor and gnashed her molars.

".....This flame will grow."

[&]quot;This will cause a stir."

[&]quot;It won't be something so minor. Somebody that returned from Eden is here in the tower. There's no way the division chiefs will leave this alone."

```
'.....What are you trying to say?'
'It's a mirror. Sophia and Eden. Going further, Orbie Clar and
 Eden are mirror images on opposite sides of the mirror called
 Hyouketsu Kyoukai.'
 Sophia ground floor.
A black-haired male Cadet Guard was sitting at the edge of a
 fountain located in the lobby with his eyes shut.
"Nash, did you hear that just now!?"
"Don't be so loud, Myun-fa. I couldn't ignore it if I wanted
 to."
The boy that was called — Nash G. Endolfin opened one eye.
"Myun-fa, you entered the tower as an apprentice Priestess."
"I'm part of the group that quit and ran away after one year
 though. I know what you're trying to say though."
With her zither tucked under her arm, the shinryoku caster sighed
 as if telling him to look.
".....There's no way I'd know. The top floor of the tower is
 connected to Eden? I've never heard of something that scary. The
 apprentice Priestesses won't know and I guess it's just Priestesses
 that would be informed?"
"In any case, there's no need to let the underlings know,
 huh."
"Are you angry?"
"No. It's just that I don't like things becoming a bother."
He quickly looked over the lobby which was in an uproar and his
```

face warped into a bitter expression.

"Even the civilians that came to the tower have heard it. It won't even take a day for this to circulate throughout Orbie Clar as a rumor...... The truth they were hiding was just too big."
"Will Orbie Clar fall into chaos?"

"This will also draw in the Governmental Sector. It'll be world-scale mayhem."

Sophia floor 287.

"Ran, where are you!? Please, if you can hear me—"

The door opened sideways and a tanned tomboy quickly walked to her.

"Oh my, you moved fast. As expected of you, Ran."

"Not like I have a choice after hearing that broadcast just now.

It's been a while since I ran up five floors using the emergency stairs."

Even though she shrugged her shoulders in a joking way, her tone was serious as usual.

"So that really is the case."

"Yeah, my subordinates and I also heard it. It'd be fine to say that every floor of the tower heard that conversation just now."

Ran replied in the affirmative to Meimel who walked over.

".....No.....way."

The strength drained out of her waist and Ymy used the chair near

her as a crutch as she struggled her way over.

.....For this kind of thing..... Who did it and for what

reason.....

My being childhood friends with Sheltis is fine to be publicized.

But for his past of having fallen to Eden to come out is the worst.

To begin with, the general populace will be stricken with worry.

The division chiefs of the tower's upper management wouldn't let

[&]quot;I hear you, Ymy. I'm here so don't worry."

that slide.

.....This time, Sheltis will be outed from the tower for sure.

.....No, that much would be fine. Depending on what happens, he might be unable to go to the living districts and be eternally confined in a facility.

"Meimel, what about that talk about Eden?"

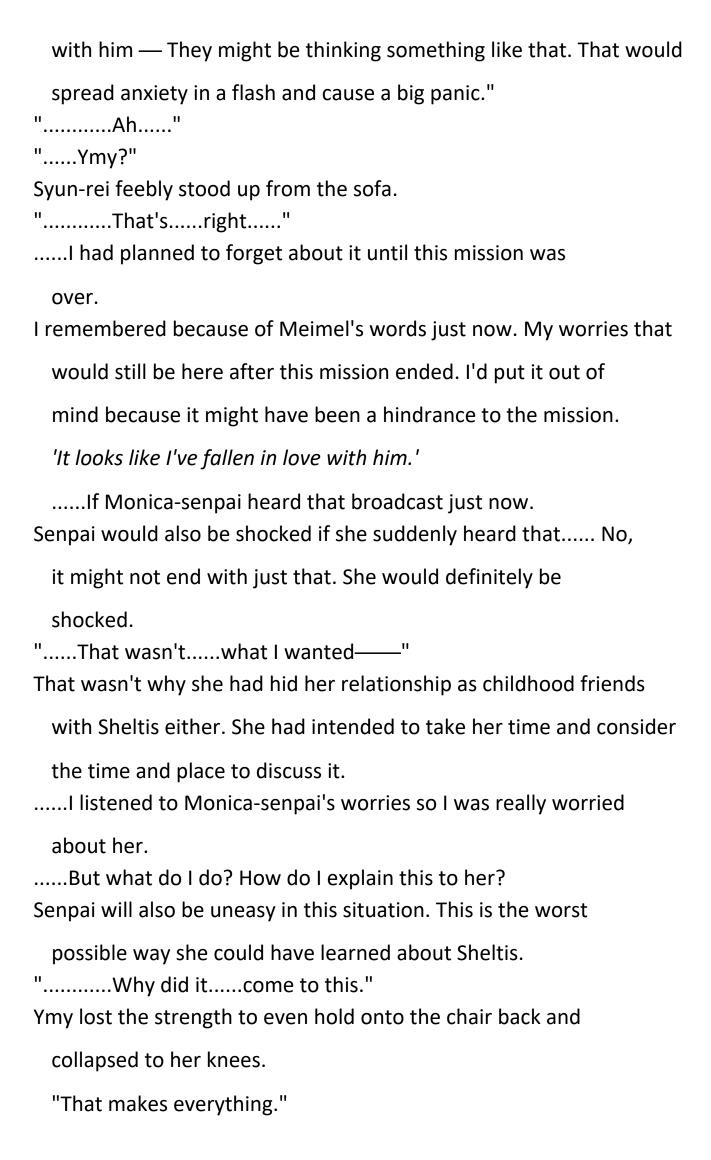
"The thing about the top floor of the tower being connected to Eden? Hrmmm. Come to think of it, I might have heard something about it from Salah-sama. I don't know whose voice that was in the broadcast but they're trying to force their side of the truth without any confirmation."

"Got it, that side will be settled if the Priestesses publicize their opinion.So the problem is with the Guards."

Ran furrowed her brow.

"First of all, the Elite Guards will be doubtful that Sheltis was an Elite Guard. They're still leaders so they won't cause a ruckus but there won't be any shortage of people wanting to confirm the truth. Also, there are the Cadet Guards. There are many of them and it looks like there are those agitated that are kicking up a fuss. It's that mail that said there's a Yuugenshu in human form lurking here. They're saying that he's the Guard carrying mateki."
"Hrmm...... It's true that the matter isn't unrelated to them as Cadet Guards. A Cadet Guard that was training with them until just yesterday actually fell into Eden and is housing mateki."
Meimel put a hand to her cheek and sighed.

"The ones we should be concerned about are the Cadet Guards that were close to him. Aren't we infected with mateki because we were



The Lord of Unusual Books watched the divided listening device fall to the ground.

"With this, I have taken away everything."



"lgun-l."
He had his fists clenched tight enough to draw blood.
No, hold it in. He's provoking me. I can't give in to anger and just scream.
'Oya, that's unexpected? I thought for sure that you'd be indignant."
'What What is your goal?"
'To interfere."
gun-l's answer was a single phrase.
'My goal is to interfere with all those people hanging around you. I'd like to cut them all away cleanly. If I do, then you'll be alone. You'll be really, really sad, right?"
'Do you have some kind of grudge against me"
Even now, Igun-I's identity was unknown. But he had no idea who he could have angered so badly no matter how much he thought back.
'No way, it's the opposite."

With his hand on his hat, Igun-I shook his head.

"If you become alone, then I'll be the only one that would extend their hand to you, right? I will be able to become everything to you. That's why."

".....You're insane."

"You will come to understand. When you come to know of 'the other half of the truth reflected in the mirror'. You will be able to accept me when you know the entirety of the truth from three years ago."

Igun-I gave a courteous bow and turned his back to Sheltis.

"Sheltis, you have heard only half of the truth. Let us meet once more when you have heard it all."

"—Do you think I'll let you get away?"

"Rather than worrying about other people, you should worry about yourself."

Stab. The raw impact of something cutting through flesh was conveyed not through sound but pain.

.....My leg?

"1?"

An enormous white snake was coiled around his knee with its

from those fangs.
"Good timing, Maha-san. It's just as we discussed."
Maha?
"Kuh?"
The pain traveling from his thigh to his buttocks and from his buttocks to his back prevent his voice from coming out. Unable to stay standing, Sheltis collapsed on the grasslands. I've seen this snake before It's the poisonous
snake from Maha's Golden Hexahedral arts.
"It's a venom that destroys muscles and organs at the cellular level, causing hemorrhaging. It's a deadly poison so I think you won't be able to breathe for a while from the pain."
The Lord of Unusual Books looked over at him with a graceful smile.
"Maha-san, after you're done, meet up with Armadel-san at the aforementioned spot. I'll also head over as soon as I'm done at Sophia."
"hi"

"You want to know what I'm going to do at Sophia? I told you, there's 'the other half of the truth'. In order to convey that to you, I'll just be taking one of the Priestesses."

".....!?"

"Ahh, I don't mean Ymy. It'll be the fourth Priestess,

Syun-rei Pia Nucclene. Her territory arts will be a hindrance to my
goal............ Ymy is last."

He announced his plans which should be critical without a care.

It's not like you can stop me, right? The challenging gaze from beneath his hat said as much.

"Well then, Sheltis, until the next time."

Igun-I raised his brimmed hat.

His pale blond hair swayed in the wind.....and the Lord of Unusual Books disappeared as if spirited away by that wind.

The only one remaining there was a single boy squirming on the ground with control over his body stolen away by deadly venom.

In the fields where only the whispering of the wind was

blowing.			
"!	Ш		

Sheltis raised a voiceless scream.

Epilogue - That Is Why The Boy Aims For the Tower

Part 1

It was time for the clouds drifting overhead to be dyed madder red.

The edge of the sky that could be seen from a cliff face in Lagoon was coloring black and the swirling wind slowly became cooler.

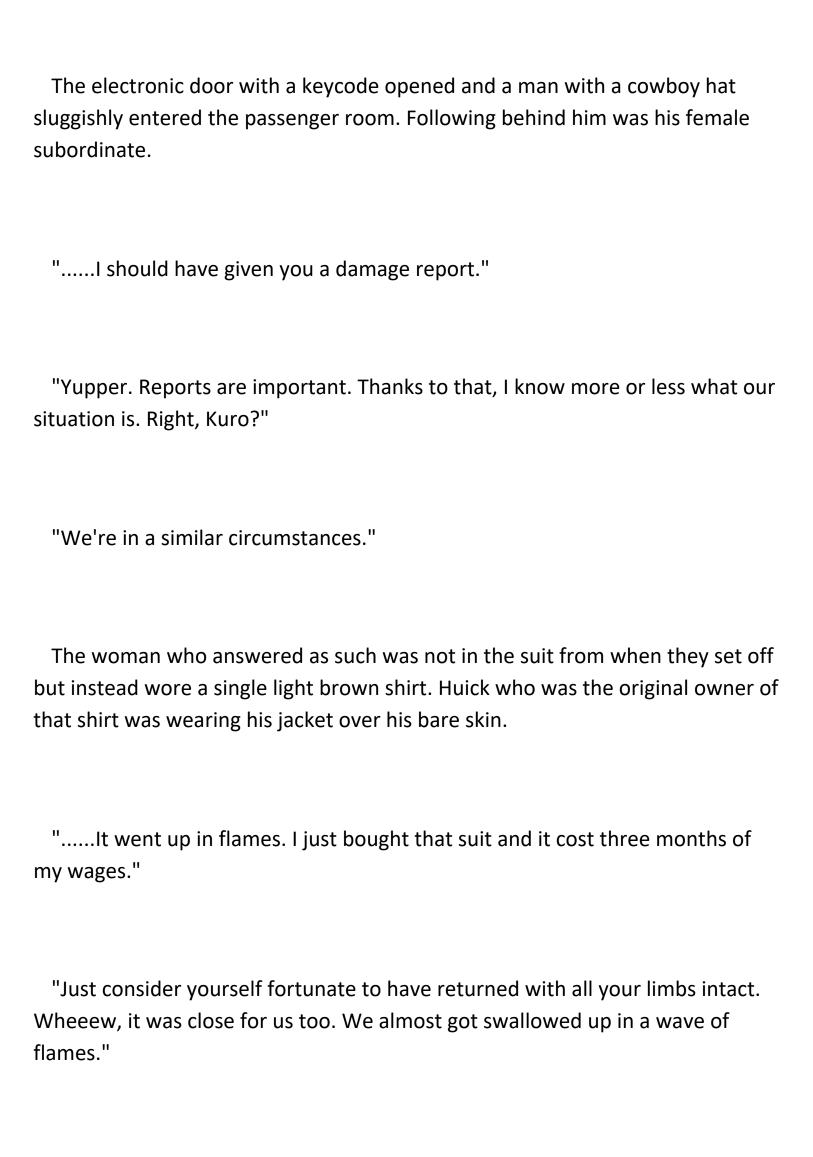
"Horn-chaaan, you'll die if you sleep right now, okay?"

"The setting sun was just too bright."

Two of the rear seats in the airship's passenger room were connected to form a simple bed. Horn was laying down face up on that.Has it been......five minutes since I closed my eyes?

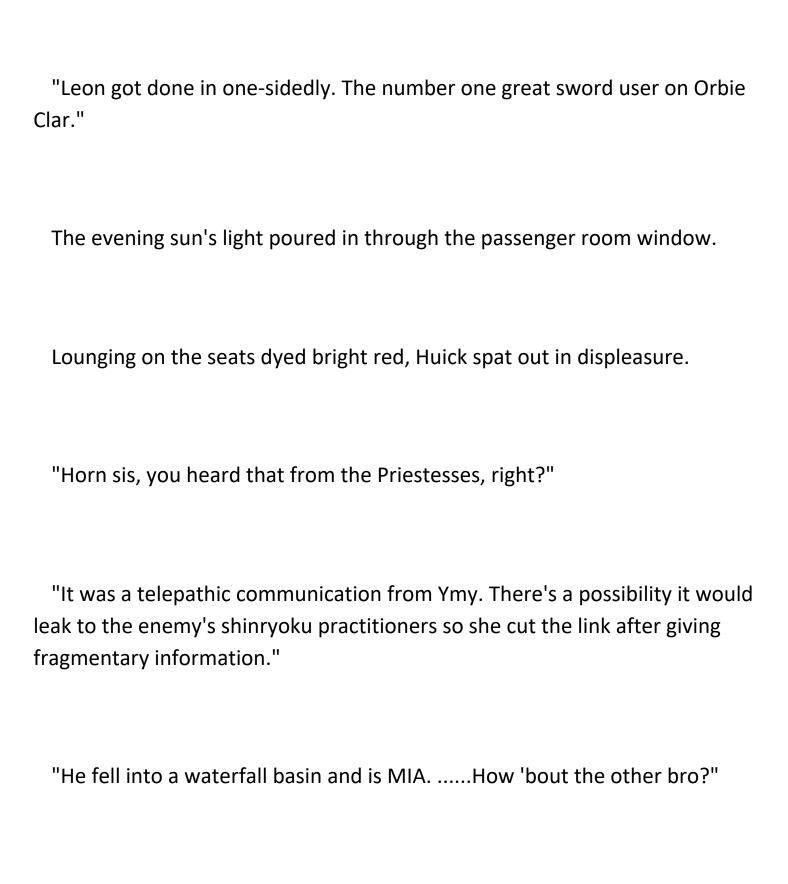
"At any rate, it didn't hit any vital organs. It should be fine to sleep."



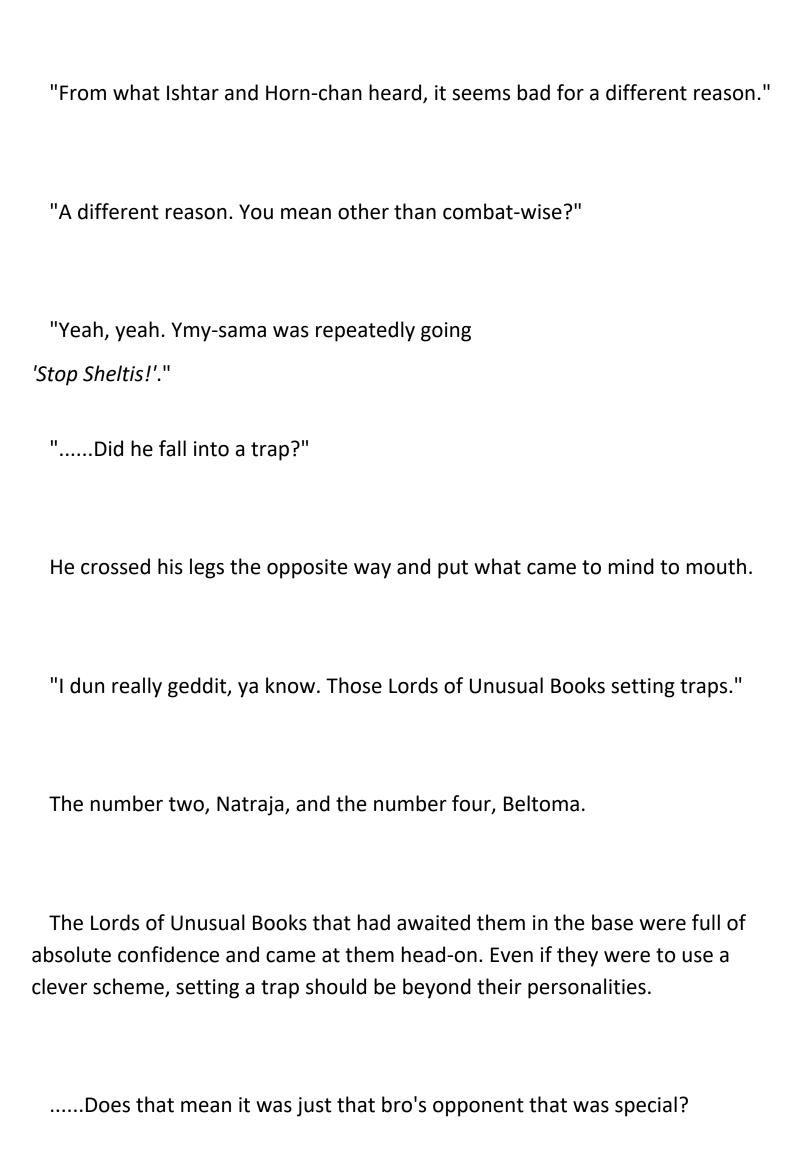




"Hah? What are you talking about?"
"I'll tell you about it when we're on auto-pilot. For now, let's get a-flying. C'mon, Yuto, sit over there and do up your seatbelt."
Eyriey nodded with a carefree expression on her face and closed the cockpit door again.



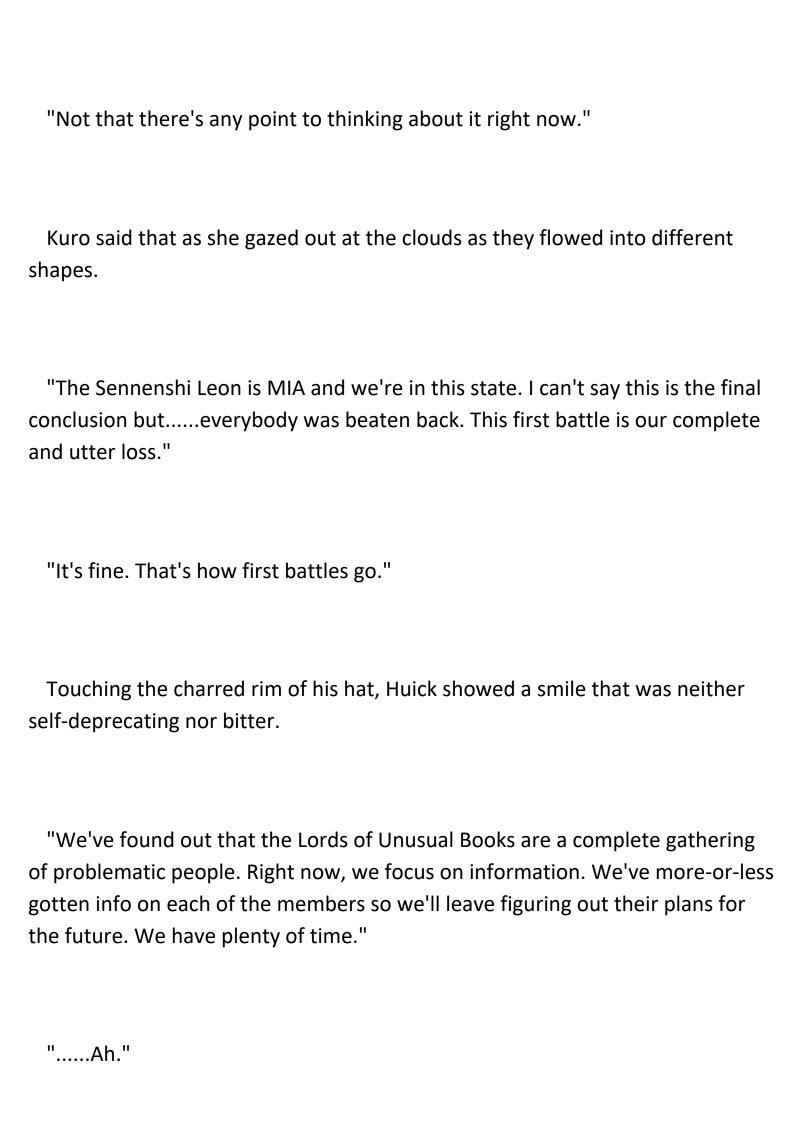
He should be talking about Sheltis. Eyriey who was sitting in a corner of the passenger room reacted first and her eyes closed slightly in an expression of loneliness.

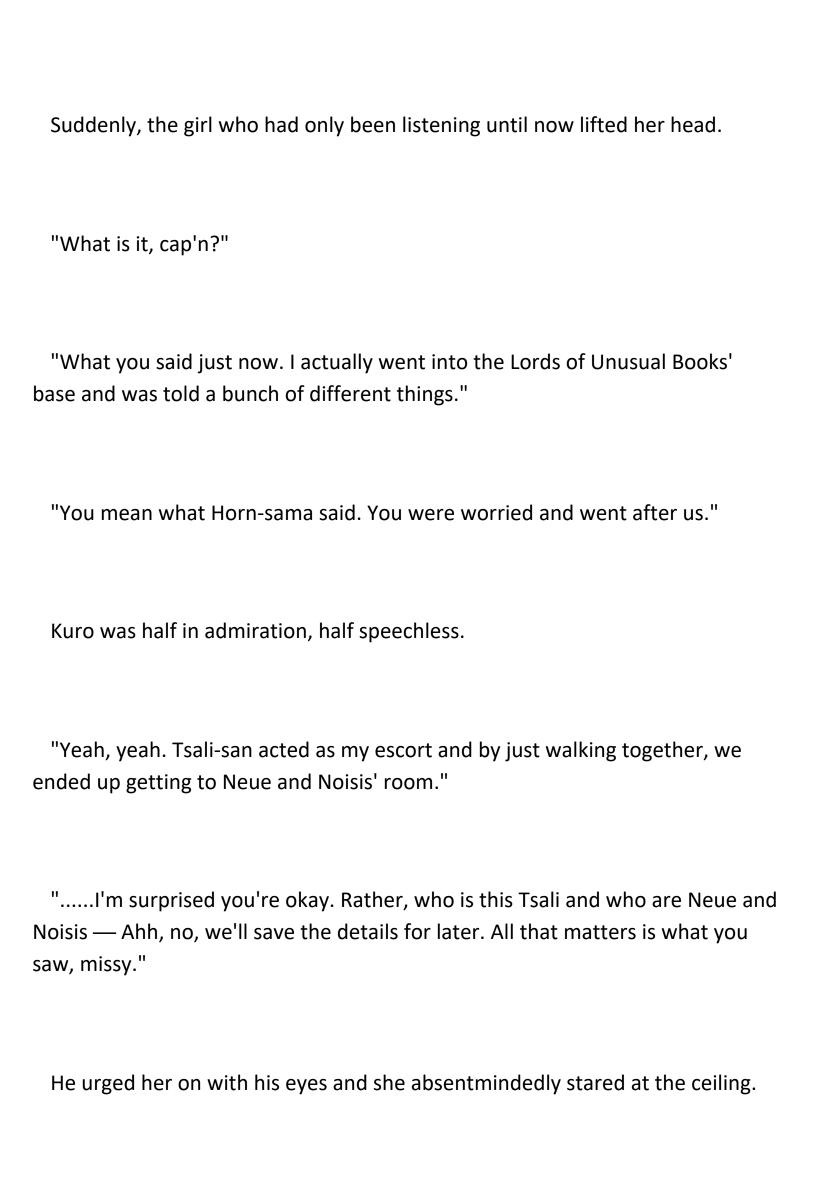


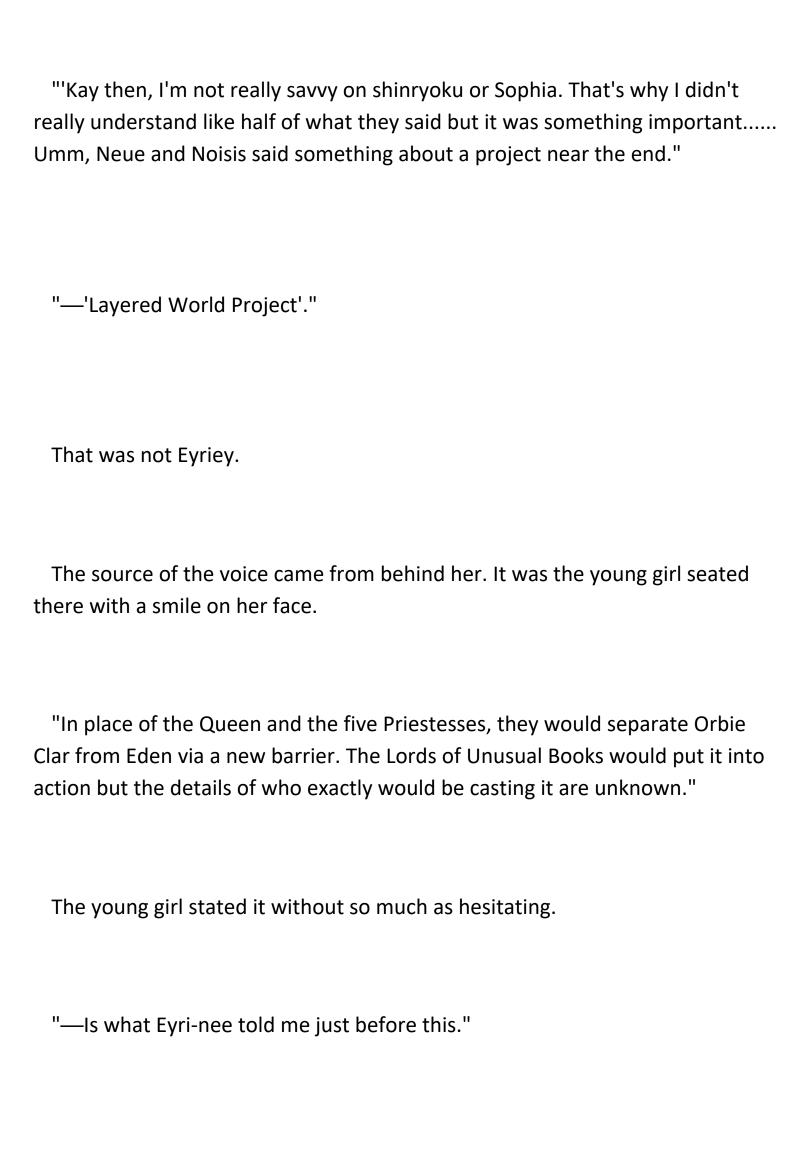
"There might have been some purpose to it." "Well, hold on a sec, Kuro. Something to do with that bro? He's a Cadet Guard, not a Sennenshi or Priestess. He shouldn't have some kind of crazy information like that." "He does." Ishtar's words echoed through the passenger room. "This is just what I think but.....putting aside whether he himself remembers, he probably holds two sets of information. The first concerns Ymy-sama and the other concerns Eden." "Whazzat mean?" "You'll find out if you just sniff around a little but he's Ymy-sama's childhood friend. As for Eden, this is his personal information so Ishtar can't speak about it all willy-nilly. If you want to know, you'll have to ask Meimel-sama."

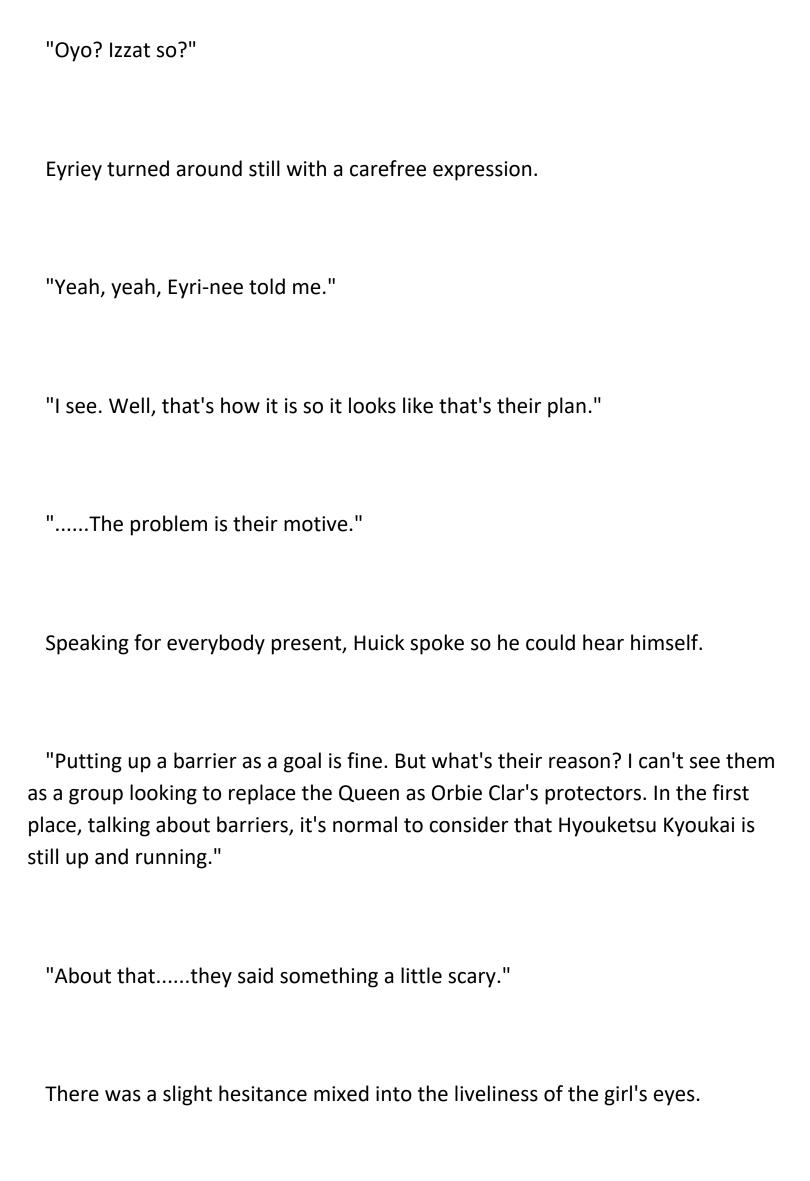
"Knowing just that much is enough. So that bro has information that would be

enough for the Lords of Unusual Books to fixate on him."











Part 3 That night. The entirety of the floating continent Orbie Clar was being assaulted by an unusually torrential downpour. —That rain was chilling. Getting soaked just once by the rain made one feel a freezing pain right to the marrow. As if ice crystals were raining down in droplet form.....that was the kind of rain it was. The tears of the heavens knocked leaves off in the sea of trees. The roar of water in the surroundings had surpassed being that of rain and was fitting for even a waterfall.

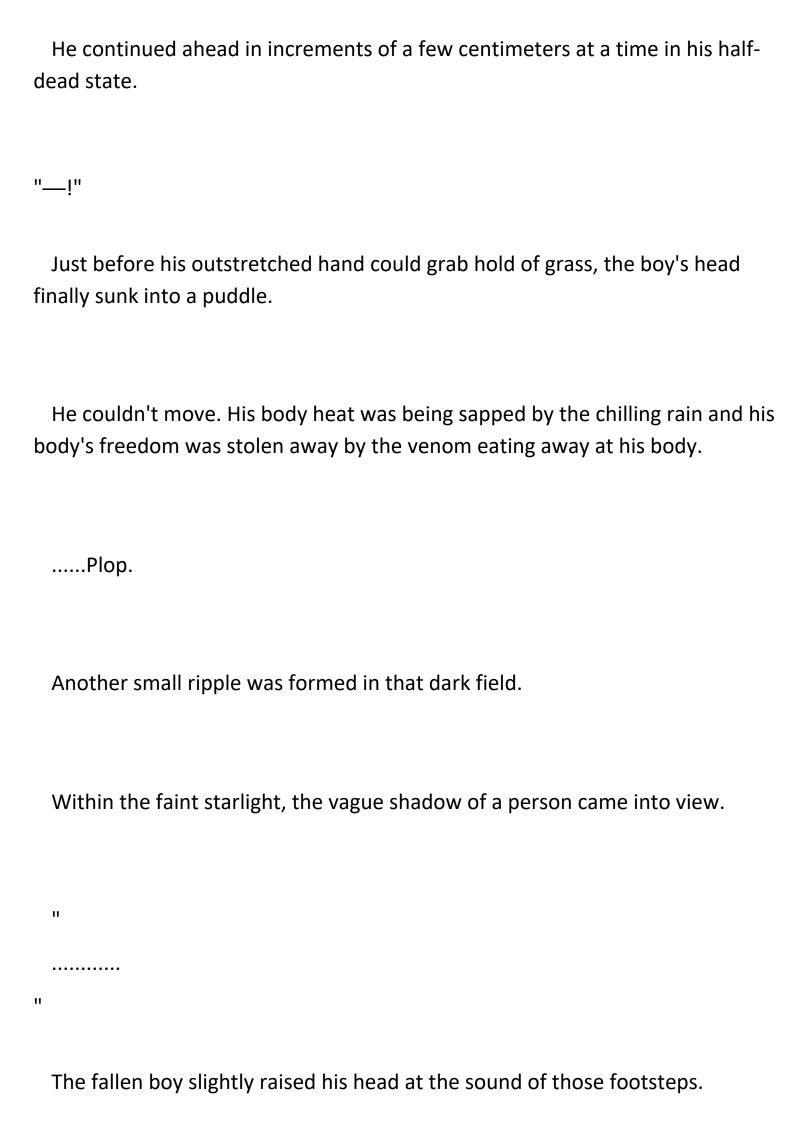
The pitch black overcast heavens showed no signs of abating despite having started several hours prior.

Just how much has continued to fall?

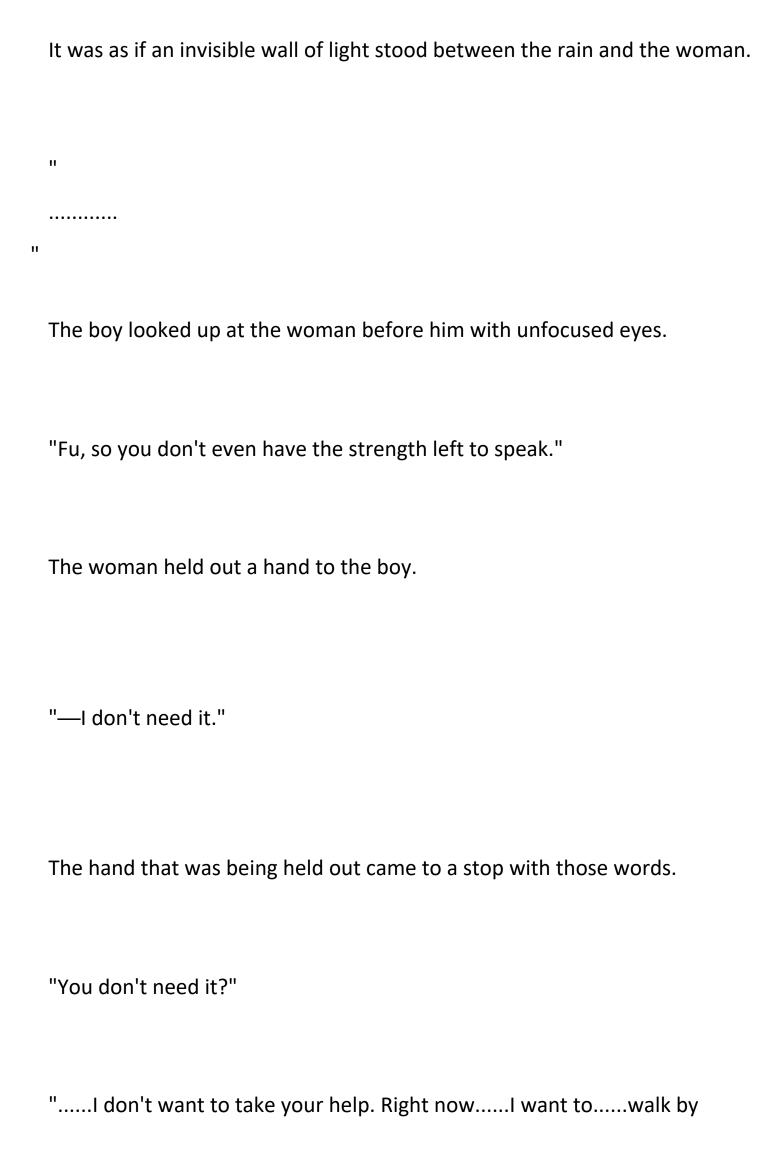
Plop.
The curtain of night fell over the grasslands and tiny little droplets had been born.
Beneath the roaring world, something was illuminated by starlight. A shadow crawled across the hills beneath the dim lighting.
—It was a single boy.
He was probably in his latter teens. His reddish brown hair which was close to purple reflected the light.
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Leaking out an anguished groan that wasn't quite a voice, the boy continued to crawl ahead in the chilling rain.

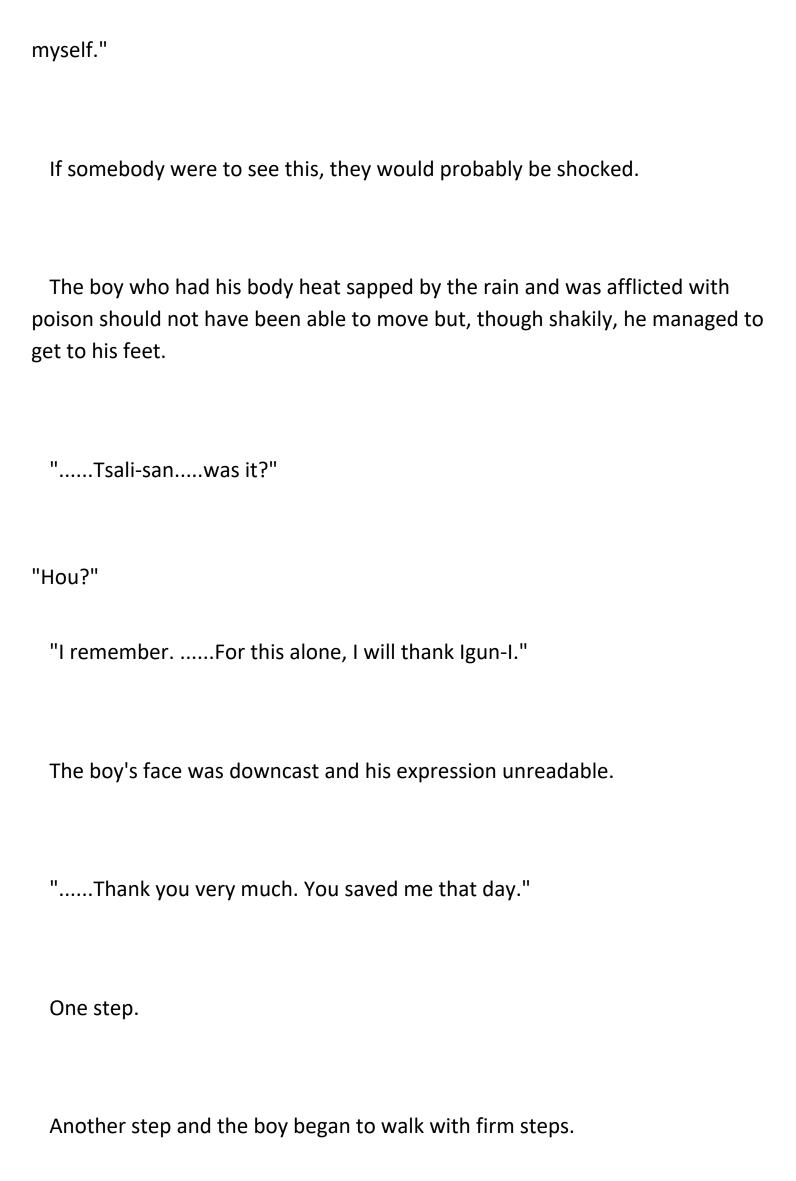
".....Hah

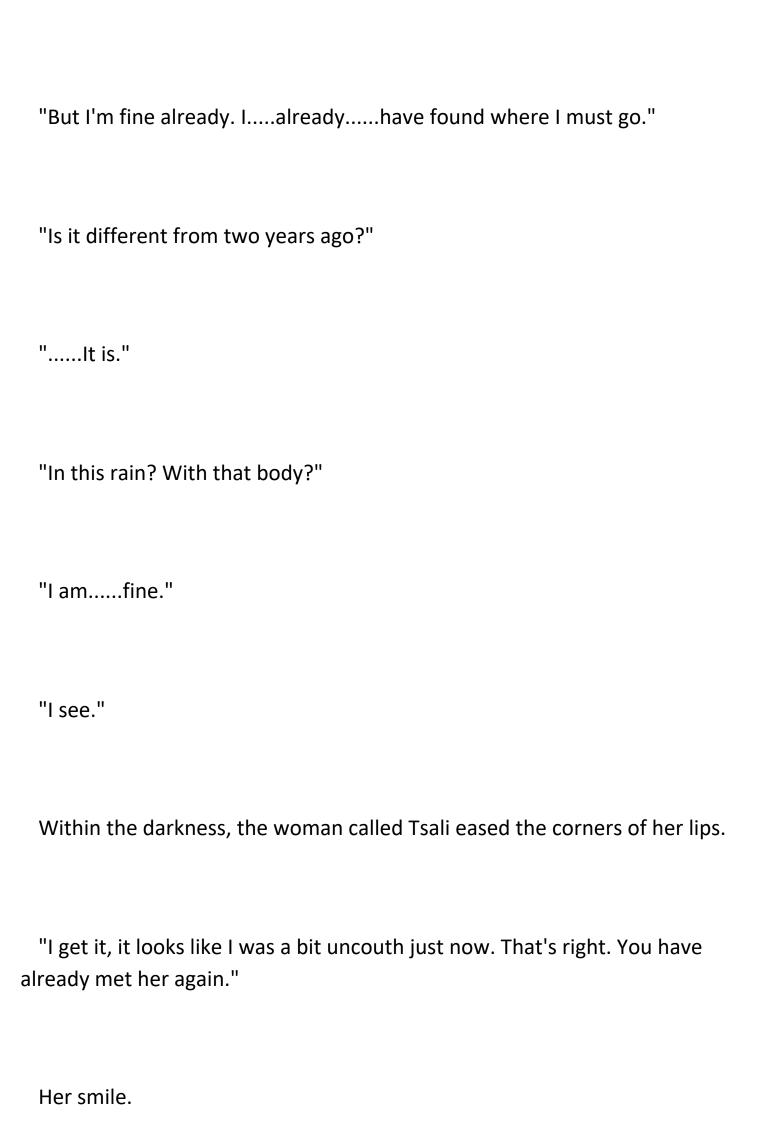




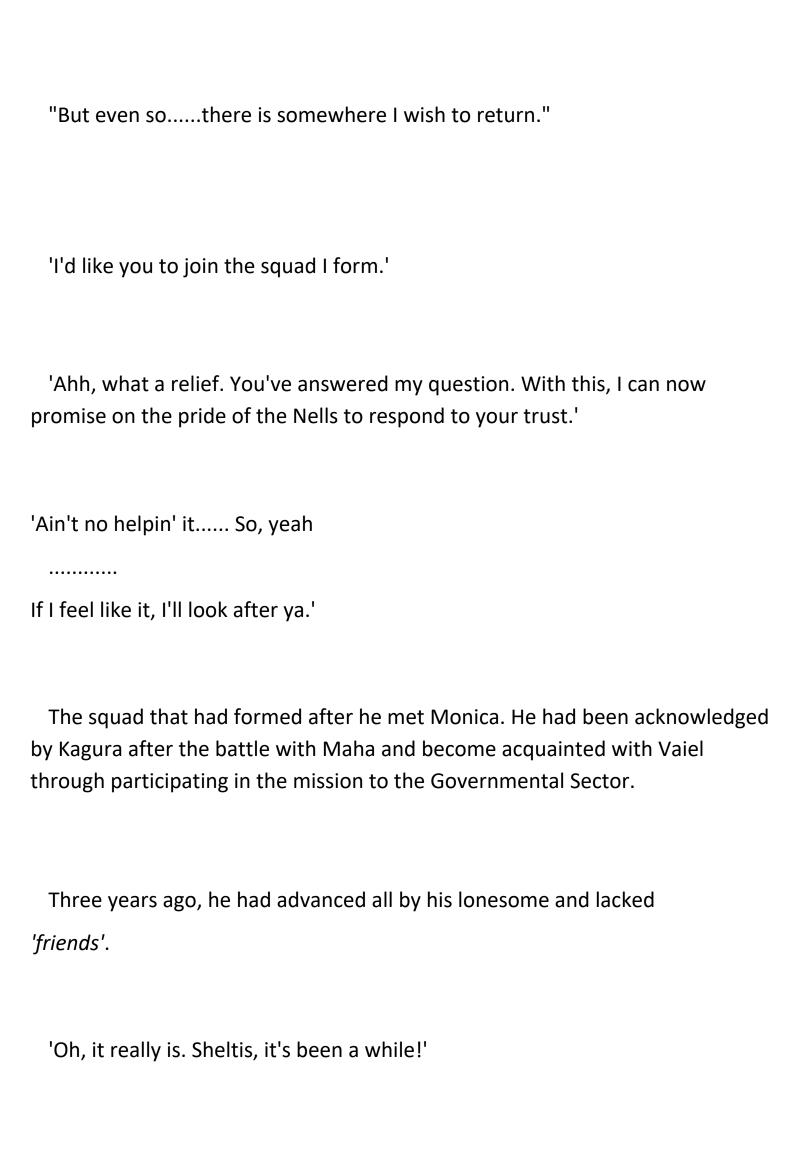
In this frozen night, the figure wore form-fitting vestments such that her body's figure could be seen.
The feeble city lights were not enough for him to make out her face. However, the voluptuous and seductive lines of her body made it so even a child could figure out she was a woman.
"Sheltis."
Her cherry lips smiled gently and the woman looked up at the sky.
A young woman. She sounded to be in her early twenties or possibly middle-aged.
"Sheltis Magna Yehle, you How much of the truth have you learned?"
—A mysterious sight.
The chilling rain bounced off with a glitter just before it hit the woman's body



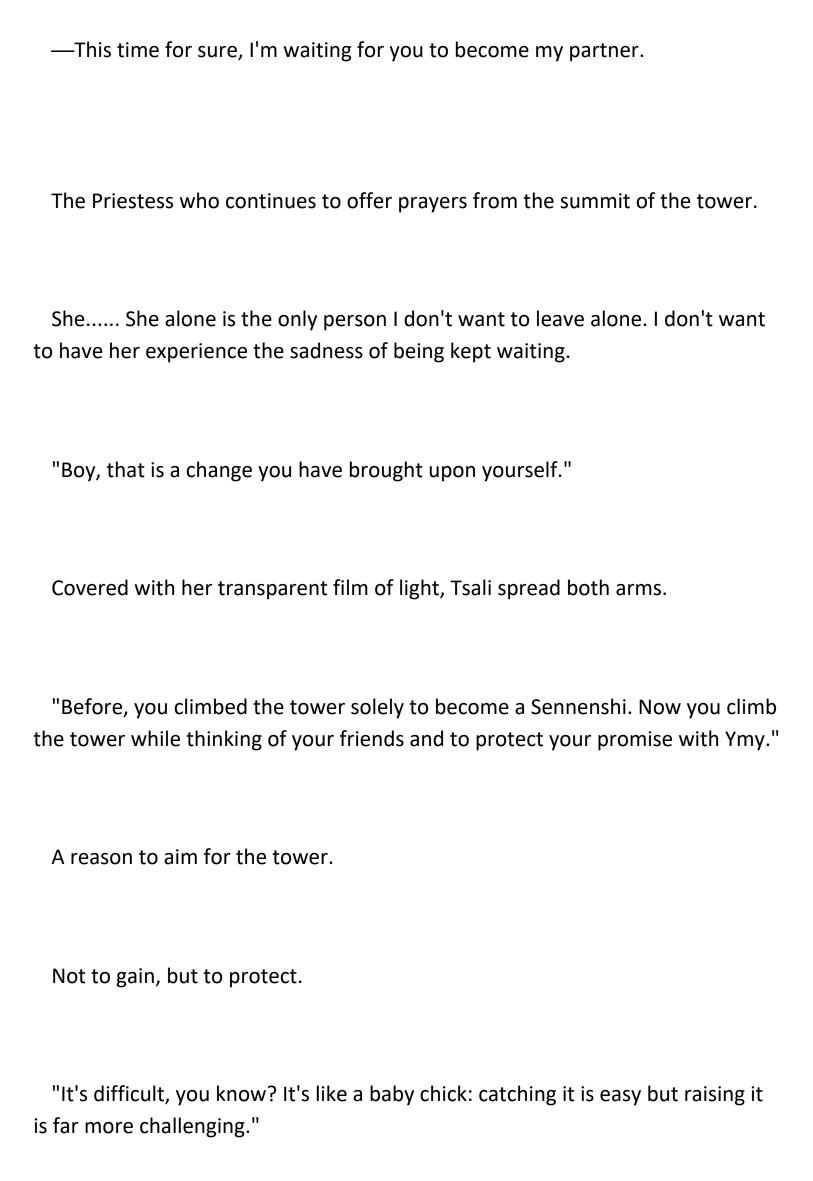




She had a gentle expression like a smile as if she was a mother welcoming her child back home.
"And that is why you aim for the tower."
"Yes."
I lost to Igun-I.
I was just a normal person that wasn't even supposed to fall into Eden.
He had been rejected by shinryoku, the power people held as a fact of the world.
He was even shunned from the destiny of succeeding the Forbidden Crystal's power.
That's who I am.



'Shel-nii, do you hate that tower? Yuto likes it. It's all shiny and pretty.'
His friends he had met after being expelled from the tower which still followed him even now that he had gone back. It had been none other than Eyriey and Yuto who had supported him through the harshest of times.
'I told you, you and I aim for different peaks.'
'Hurry up and climb up here. I've got no competition without you.'
His old friends from before he fell to Eden.
Ishtar who did not choose the expected path of becoming a Sennenshi and his irreplaceable friend who had become a Sennenshi, Leon.
And



"I stillhave things left to do."
Eden's mateki and Eden Code.
Within the truth of three years ago he had learned of from Igun-I, there was not a single thing connected to those.
There are still secrets remaining.
'Something' that nobody has touched yet which is related to me. That will surely become the final hope against Eden and Igun-I.
It will become the key to fulfilling my promise with Ymy.





Her breath was swept away by the wind.
She watched her white, glistening breath disperse into the night and—
"You don't have shinryoku like the Queen or Ymy. But, boy, shinryoku and the blessing of the Forbidden Crystal have no bearing on this. The strength of a person is that of the 'will' residing within you. A true paradise is not a place, it is the succession of that will."
"A true paradise."
"Right. That possibility was entrusted to you by Shasa and then by Iris a thousand years ago. You will now succeed that by your own will."
Then.
Her eyes housed a glitter as Tsali watched Sheltis from behind.
"Three years ago. You fell into Eden instead of Ymy and that was no ending — prove to me that it will bring about a future where the Forbidden Crystal is liberated from Eden and 'The Promised Land <tsalabel>' is brought about on Orbie Clar.</tsalabel>

Afterword

Blank Baptism. After a merciless ceremony that washes away everything, is it despair that's left behind or.....

Thank you for picking up this book. I'm Sazane Kei.

I just started writing 'Eden' not too long ago and it's already the seventh volume. The climax of Episode I finally came around with this volume and I wonder, did you all enjoy it?

A little bit of the full truth of the world has come out and who the fated enemies are is gradually becoming clear with this volume. Starting from Sheltis and Ymy, everybody around them has grown little by little in mind — following this, I'd like to strive such that Episode II will be even more heated.

Recent Events

Just like I announced on my blog, I changed jobs in April of this year. I was with my previous job for about two years and it was somewhat lonesome leaving my place. It's been a while since I felt such loneliness like a school graduation. Now I'm anxiously awaiting whether I'll manage to pass a year in my new workplace.

••••

♦ Thanks

In a way, this will be the final 'thanks'.

Last month, my editor K-san who has supported me from my debut work up to 'Eden' has been replaced. After five years, the shock was big but with what I've learned up to now, in place of gratitude, I swear to work hard from now on as well.

From now on, I look forward to working with and ask for your support, my new editor S-san and Kasukabe Akira-san brings evermore beautiful colors to Eden.

◆ Next Volume Preview

Hey, Sheltis, you can feel it, right? The tragedy of being the sole heretic within the world.

Having come to know yourself and the natural order of the world, where do you

plan to go?

Sheltis has returned to Sophia.

But he is already too late and Sophia has been swallowed up by a vortex of chaos. Orbie Clar trembles in light of the truth Igun-I communicated. Bonds crumble away with a sound. In a tower filled with screams and suspense, will the boy's do-or-die cry be heard?

The story has reached a turning point and plunges into the second half. Let us meet again in September in 'Hyouketsu Kyoukai no Eden 8 Resonating Grief –Cruel Shout-'.

(Maybe the titles will change a bit too with the changing of Episodes?)

2011 August, latter third Sazane Kei

Blog: http://sazane.exblog.jp